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WOMEN IN ECONOMY CONFERENCE- Rethinking Entrepreneurship for Today's Women

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**WOMEN IN ECONOMY CONFERENCE–
Rethinking Entrepreneurship for Today's Women
Organised by
Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC)**

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And greetings.

I am very happy to be here with you all on this auspicious occasion. Barely a generation ago, women were expected to be homemakers.

Today, I stand in front of you all, the movers and shakers of the business world as well as politics.

We've come a long way and there's more to be done.

May 9 this year witnessed a threshold moment that brought us a new era.

There are many expectations that are associated with this new era which has been given the moniker Malaysia Baru or New Malaysia.

I think we can all smell the freedom in the air since Malaysia Baru.

There are less restrictions on the press.

Politicians have to get used to being openly criticised by and through the media.

Above all, many Malaysians believe that things will get better.

As the government, we are determined to strengthen our democratic institutions.

Malaysia Baru is going to be a society based on strong institutions and not just about creating strong leaders.

And the strength of these institutions will come from their independence and the involvement of the rakyat.

Allow me to take a moment to share with you an idea that we are discussing and that is gaining traction.

Explaining this idea will help me frame my view of the future role of women in economy.

We term this idea the Fajr Doctrine.

Fajr is dawn, the moment when the sun is about to rise, ushering in a new day.

As we usher in Malaysia Baru, Fajr Doctrine will help frame how we see the future of development in Malaysia.

Malaysia's development was based on a strong partnership between the state and the private sector.

This worked well when we were seeking to industrialise the country and the focus was on expanding the economic pie.

The private sector is profit driven and creates economic value.

The government creates the conditions and policies needed to enable business activities to grow.

The government also steps into areas of activities that have no profit incentive and cannot be served by the private sector.

Thus, the government continues to play an important role in education, healthcare, public order and security, defence and social welfare.

This state-private sector partnership was the cornerstone of our approach all this while.

These two were the pillars of our development approach.

However, this approach has its limitations.

The private sector will not go into areas where there is no profit to be made.

The state can do many things but has the tendency to create enormous bureaucracies that are often criticised for being inefficient and fiscally burdensome.

As a result, there is often a vacuum in certain areas.

With development, we also see the emergence of various social problems.

Urban migration, rising cost of living and the breakdown of the extended family structure has led to many social ills and created new challenges.

Neither the state nor the private sector has been able to provide an effective response to many of these problems.

We would like our development to be like the rising tide.

The writer Bakri Musa pointed out that a just and equitable development is like the rising tide that brings up the small as well as big vessels in the port.

It does not leave anyone behind.

Malaysia Baru has to be able to plug the holes that are currently still leaving some people behind.

If we fail this, we may have wealth and prosperity as individuals, but we will live a life fearful of others who may steal and rob from us.

Many of us are already living behind high walls and gated communities because of our fear of others.

One lawyer once noted that we have gone back to the days of “medieval fortresses”, with the rich fortified behind great walls from the poor.

This cannot possibly be happiness.

We can only experience true happiness when we can trust others around us.

We only have true happiness when we live in peace and tranquillity and not in fear and worry.

This can only be achieved when we have just and equitable development that improves the wellbeing of everyone.

Over the years, we've seen a growth in the role of non-state actors in filling this vacuum.

NGOs, individual volunteers, local communities as well as social enterprises had emerged to provide services to the marginalised segments of society.

In the past, the relationship between these non-state actors and the state has not always been warm.

We have seen how NGOs providing running soup kitchens in Kuala Lumpur were once criticised by government officials.

We believe that these non-state actors are in fact important for the future of the country.

They are driven by altruism and the desire to help others and are nimbler than state bureaucracies.

They have shown that they can do more with less.

The Fajr Doctrine envisions a future where non-state actors will become the third pillar of development.

Even as we expect the private sector to play a more active role through their corporate social responsibility activities, we have to recognise that these activities are not a part of the core competencies of most businesses.

The Fajr Doctrine envisions a future where the state and the private sector work together with non-state actors to catch those who fall through the cracks as we pursue development and growth.

A key concern for non-state actors is resources.

Non-state actors are often run by volunteers.

Even for social enterprises, capital constraints can be an issue.

As such, the role of the state and the private sector is to provide more support for the non-state actors.

This support can be in the form of funding, volunteers and ideas.

One component we consider important in the Fajr Doctrine is resource mediators.

These resource mediators can be in the form of foundations, mediating technologies as well as other non-banking sources of funds.

These resource mediators will be at the centre of the triangle linking the state, private sector and non-state actors.

I believe the Fajr Doctrine provides the overarching framework in translating the ideas expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in empowering women and girls.

We would like non-state actors to become a part of the mechanism for empowering women and girls.

This can be through programmes that help women and girls migrate out of poverty and dependency.

It can also be through the activism that will enable women and girls become the prime movers of social change.

We would like to deconstruct the dependence-inducing nature of welfarism. (from that of a handout culture to one of a sustainable nature)

We consider the Fajr Doctrine a guiding principle in making the rakyat take charge of their destinies.

While helping people through welfare programmes will continue to be necessary, our ultimate goal is to get recipients to graduate out of welfare programmes.

The state, the private sector and non-state actors need to work together to create employment and even create opportunities for the marginalised.

Social entrepreneurship programmes will play an important role in this approach.

With this approach, poverty reduction is not just about giving welfare handouts ala BR1M.

Poverty reduction will have to be more about employment and wealth creation through social entrepreneurship and other programmes that get people out of poverty.

I had the pleasure of meeting the Nobel prize winner from Bangladesh Muhammad Yunus.

His concept of “social business” is about pro-social goals and not profit, which to him, is the solution to social and environmental problems caused by intense capitalist competition.

He points out that entrepreneurship is a particular boon for women, whose family duties make normal office hours sometimes difficult.

Having described that, I would like now to move on and discuss how the Fajr Doctrine is relevant to the role of women in economy.

Various studies on women leaders and entrepreneurs have shown that women leaders are associated with certain qualities.

Alam found that women rely more on social networking.

They depend on the contacts for business as well as social support.

Goleman found that women have a stronger sense of emotional empathy.

This means that women are better at sensing the emotional state and reactions of others.

Goleman argues that the higher level of emotional empathy makes women better at leading groups.

It is therefore not surprising that activities that rely on social networking such as Tupperware parties, Avon's direct selling model and tontine schemes, more commonly known as main kutu in Malaysia are popular among women.

Likewise, the attraction that careers like teaching and nursing has for women is just not because these are seen as careers requiring gentleness.

Women are better at these jobs because they have a higher level of emotional empathy.

For the Fajr Doctrine to succeed, we need leaders in government, the private sector and in non-state actors who are driven by their conscience, good at networking and are empathetic.

We need business leaders whose conscience drives them to see beyond profit.

We need public officials whose conscience drives them to see their roles in government as one of being enablers of change and not as naysayers.

And we need activists who are driven by altruism and the desire to help others.

We need capable NGO leaders, community leaders as well as leaders for social enterprises to build a credible third pillar.

The evidence seems to suggest that women are just better suited at doing all these.

Thus, when we talk about women in economics we need to recognize that we will continue to need more women leaders in the private sector.

We need more leaders at the top of the decision-making hierarchy.

We also need more capable women as activists leading the non-state actors.

And we need more women in government to enable the private sector and non-state actors.

As I have said earlier, our success will depend on our ability to have just and equitable development.

The rising tide of development must not leave anyone behind.

To achieve this, the three pillars of the Fajr Doctrine must support one another for this to happen.

Given the qualities associated with women leaders, I believe that women can be the glue that keeps the Fajr Doctrine together.

Their networking skills and their emotional empathy should make them better able to understand the perspective of others.

In addition, the landscape of Malaysia's economy is beginning to change.

We are shifting towards an innovation driven economy.

Yoder points out that many men leaders tend to masculinise work by emphasising behaviour that value assertiveness, decisiveness and domination.

These qualities are well suited in an industrialised economy with its emphasis on manufacturing.

Work in the manufacturing sector tends to be highly routine, where compliance and conformity are highly valued.

A masculine leadership fits well into this environment.

This has led some women leaders to believe that they should be more like men in their leadership behaviours.

They have to discard their femininity and become more masculine.

I am sure many of us here have encountered women leaders who exhibit dominating behaviours.

However, in an innovation-driven work environment, leaders need to manage the creative effort of their team.

Work is not simply about compliance and conformity.

Mumford's work on managing creativity shows that managing creativity requires leaders who are able to provide a sense of direction, facilitate creative discourse, manage conflict and tap into the diversity of their team.

Kolb argues that this work environment requires leaders who are more empathetic, willing to listen and who value non-conformity.

Guess who has the qualities that are more suited to lead in this work environment?

I would argue that to be effective in an innovation driven work place, women leaders should be their natural selves.

They should not have to be masculine and be like men.

Those men who continue to think that a masculine-type leadership behaviour is the only way to lead will be left behind as Malaysia becomes more innovation driven.

Do women who emulate these men want to be left behind?

I can't claim to be the most experienced or capable women leader.

But my life as a medical practitioner and later on as the leader of an opposition party did create many demands on myself.

I had to serve as PKR president while still raising my children and with my husband in prison.

Looking back at all these difficult moments, I never once felt that I had to become dominating, bossy and to behave like a prima donna.

I maintained my femininity and it got me somewhere.

I know maintaining a work-life balance is difficult for most women.

Do not shun motherhood because of this challenge.

If you can deal with a group of children, it can help you become a good team leader.

If you can stand and endure being repeatedly asked “Why mummy?”, you should be able to handle creative discourse in the work place.

If you can manage your children fighting over a toy, it should give you some idea on how to manage conflict in the work place.

Of course, this is simple advice that you will not find incorporated into any management theory or book.

But this is the insight from a mother and grandmother who has some experience juggling the demands of family, motherhood and grandmotherhood with political leadership.

Family and motherhood can create the experience density needed to become a better leader.

The pressures and stress mothers experience can make them intellectualise their problems and trigger creative thinking.

Consider motherhood as your leadership bootcamp and not a burden. God bless motherhood.

Be yourself, be a woman and let's go and change the world.

Do not let politicians only define what Malaysia Baru is.

Take charge of your destiny. Use our femininity to your advantage and to help build a better Malaysia.

Help us build the pillars of Fajr Doctrine so that we can plug the holes in our development.

Be the glue that makes the three pillars of Fajr Doctrine strong and vibrant.

With this we can bring about a more just and equitable development.

I thank you all for listening.

I am just sharing my insights and simple ideas.

You do not have to agree with everything I say but I hope you can reflect on them. Terima kasih.

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