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PM Says Gender Friendly Environment Vital To Enhance Human Capital

General

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PUTRAJAYA, Aug 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Friday the public and private sectors must understand the importance of creating a positive and gender friendly environment to enhance human capital in the country.

He said he hoped that more measures would be taken to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in the workplace in line with the government's focus on encouraging more women to take up jobs.

The implementation of policies sensitive to the gender issue should become the practice at every organisation, for example providing nurseries at the workplace, he said in his speech launching National Women's Day 2006 at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre, here. The text of Abdullah's speech was read out by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Abdullah said the government had provided incentives to encourage employers to make available such facilities but many have yet to do so.

"The government is committed towards moving ahead with its development agenda and empowering women so that they can contribute to economic growth and increase their income and enhance their quality of life as well," he said.

Abdullah said gender equality was one of the important agendas in the government's effort to realise the objective of making the country a developed nation founded on balanced development and based on the universal principles of Islam Hadhari (Civilisational Islam).

He said development and gender equality in various fields, whether in the political, economic, social and cultural fields, were objectives that must be achieved.

This brought benefit not only to women but also contributed to raising the quality of life of the people in general, he said.

Nevertheless, he said, often the objective of gender equality was not achieved owing to lack of awareness and guidance on how to arrive at the objective.

"Changing the mentality of society to accept the role and contribution of women was a prerequisite to having a first-class mentality," he said.

Abdullah said experience has shown that gender equality could not be achieved through formulation of laws and policies alone.

He also said that the government could realise the aspiration of genuine gender equality and respect between men and women only with a change in mentality and support of the people.

Najib told reporters later that the Cabinet had set up three committees to look into laws and regulations, including articles in the Federal Constitution, that contained elements of gender inequality.

One committee, chaired by the Attorney-General's Chambers, would look at articles in the Federal Constitution while another, led by the Ministry of Home Affairs, would study the laws and regulations related to immigration, he said.

The Ministry of Human Resources would chair a committee to look into laws and regulations pertaining to employment, he added.

"The Cabinet this month approved a request by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development for a review of all laws and regulations that may contain elements of gender inequality," said Najib.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said non-working women numbering 4.5 million also contributed to economic growth and wellbeing of the people, adding that housewives alone numbered 2.8 million.

She said housewives contributed 45.3 per cent of unpaid care work, saying that given value in terms of ringgit this would amount to RM45.3 billion.

At the event, 10 personalities were honoured as leaders who had pioneered the development of women.

They are the country's first woman minister Tun Fatimah Hashim, exemplary teacher R. Bhupalan, welfare activist Datuk Lily Abdul Majeed, woman activist abroad Datin Paduka Ruby Lee, volunteer exemplary nurse Datin Athi Nahappan Janaky, Women Aid Malaysia founder Puan Sri Hong Eu Ngoh, Girl Guides activities activist Datuk Hendon Din, National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) founders Tan Sri Kamsiah Ibrahim and Toh Puan Umasundari Sambanthan and woman activist Puan Sri Dr Fatimah Hamid Don.

Najib, on behalf of the prime minister, also launched three projects of the ministry -- Wanita FM radio channel, "Her Voice" women's magazine and "Bajet Gender" guidebook.

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