Rosmah proposes summit of first ladies on nurturing women leaders

DUBAI - Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor has called for the convening of the "Summit of First Ladies on Nurturing Women Leaders of Tomorrow" next year to seek ways to advance women's role in leadership as well as address issues affecting them.

"Malaysia will be happy to move towards making the first summit a reality and I would like to appeal to all first ladies and leaders' wives to participate in this summit," said the wife of Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

She said this in her keynote address at the Women in Leadership Forum here Monday attended by some 500 influential women from the political, academic and business sectors from all over the world.

"The outcome of this summit will, I'm sure, receive the highest and utmost attention of the leaders of many countries and hopefully will translate into action," she told the gathering.

Rosmah told the Malaysian media later that a suitable date would be fixed for the proposed summit to take place.

Malaysia's Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said the cabinet had given the green light for the convening of the summit.

In her speech, Rosmah said she believed that first ladies could play an integral part in promoting the leadership role of women in their respective countries.

"First ladies are uniquely positioned to reach out and make a difference to the society through their involvement in voluntary organisations to assist the poor, the less privileged and those in need," she said.

Rosmah cited the example of Malaysia's Association of Wives of Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti), of which she is president, that provides scholarships and medical and health assistance to the needy and initiates projects for the disabled.

Bakti's humanitarian efforts had also touched lives in places like Bosnia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Gaza and the Philippines, she said.

She also mentioned her work in advancing early childhood education and care, as well as efforts to identify and nurture gifted children.

Rosmah urged all first ladies and wives of leaders to use their capacities to fight for the cause of strengthening the leadership role of women.

"We must play our part to ensure that the national leadership in our respective countries does not overlook the great potential of the female workforce to lead in commerce, industry and politics," she said.

Asked to elaborate on the proposed summit later, Rosmah said it would be handled by Shahrizat's ministry.

She said influential women leaders and professionals would also be invited to give their input on how first ladies could better help women in their respective countries.

According to Rosmah, different countries would have their own set of problems as far as women were concerned, but the important thing was to find common ground in moving forward.

She expressed confidence that the proposed summit would enable first ladies to pick up valuable pointers on how to resolve issues affecting women in their own countries.