

Prime Minister Opens National Symposium of Malaysian Women



■ The Canadian International Development Agency's program in Malaysia's newly established Women's Entrepreneurial Fund (WEF) funded its first activity, the National Symposium of Women Entrepreneurs, held in Kuala Lumpur on July 26-28, 1990. This pioneering event was rated a smash hit by all participants, who came from all parts of Malaysia, several ASEAN countries, and Canada and the United States.

Over the next two years, with a budget of \$300,000, WEF will contribute to projects which are designed to develop women's entrepreneurial skills and enhance their participation in income-generating activities, business and trade enterprises. WEF reflects the reorientation of the CIDA program in Malaysia which now concentrates on industrial development cooperation initiatives. In particular, the new orientation underlines the importance of promoting cooperation between the Malaysian and Canadian private and public commercial sectors as a means to assist

Malaysia to develop its industrial and technological base.

The symposium was organized by PENIAGAWATI (the Association of Bumiputera Business and Professional Women in the Federal Territory and Selangor State). The objectives of the symposium were to: (a) develop a profile of Women Entrepreneurs in Malaysia, (b) evaluate their prospects, (c) formulate plans and strategies for their further enhancement in the context of Malaysia's industrial economy, and (d) produce a framework for a National Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

The symposium was opened by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was one of the audience of 1,500 who enjoyed a lively skit produced by the organizers. This conveyed, in a lighthearted fashion, a serious message — the difficulties and frustrations encountered by women wishing to venture into business and their limited access to credit facilities.

The Canadian contribution,

through WEF, covered the cost of conference facilities, secretariat support, printing of resource kits and promotional material, accommodation and meals for the participants, internal transportation and the travel and associated costs of six resource persons from ASEAN. A grant was also provided by the Prime Minister's Department to cover the use of facilities at the Putra World Trade Centre and hospitality-related expenses at the official opening.

The symposium provided an opportunity for Malaysian and ASEAN businesswomen to meet together in formal and informal sessions to share their experiences and expertise.

From left to right: Puan Jenny Shabudin, Organizing Chairwoman; Mr Michael Conway, Counsellor (Development), Canadian High Commission; Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister; Dato' Seri Rafidab Aziz, Minister of Trade and Industry; Puan Hajjab Faridah Shamsudin, President of PENIAGAWATI