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Not yet won

BY virtually every measure, women are thriving. No longer are they considered second-class citizens, an appendage to the male figure that acts as a father or a husband and a burden to the parents who must marry her off.

Malaysian women have amply demonstrated their ability to outshine men in many fields, prompting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to declare that the future of the country will be determined by women. Male students are on the weak side of the education gender gap as evidenced by their mediocre academic performance and their shrinking population in universities. There seems to be male under-performance - not only at college but also at the workplace and, sadly, at home where they fail to fulfil their roles as husband, father and son.

The deficit in male performance may ironically lead to the classification of men as the second sex. More worri-some, it will fracture the nation's development - a task that requires the commitment of both men and women. Clearly, there must be a concerted national effort to get the boys back on track.

However, the gains made by women should not be overstated. Some professionals slip into perverse submissiveness at home, willing mind and body to receive the physical and emotional blows dealt by abusive spouses.

The most ordinary of aspirations and the prosaic ingredients of life, such as self-esteem and self-worth, are denied to many due either to lack of awareness or the repressive patriarchal power in the family, society and in misplaced religious zeal. Women's political participation must be augmented with more seats in the Federal and State Legislatures. The battle is still on for more female inclusion in the nation's intellectual, political, social, economic and artistic agendas.