

# 'Women, youth key to growth of Muslim world'

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Women and youths are beacons of hope and have the greatest potential to contribute to the advancement of the Muslim world.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said women, who by nature were well-organised, and youths, who possess innovative thoughts, were crucial for the progress of the Muslim world.

"They have always been the determining factors behind the success of civilisations," he said in his opening address at the World Islamic Economic Forum's Businesswomen and Young Leaders' Forum here.

Najib said the successful cultivation of these groups had been the main reason why civilisations continued to sustain and reinvent themselves, building a strong foundation for a healthy society.

As such, he said, the lack of attention towards these two groups had been the reason for the breakdown of society in the past, as well as the present as could be seen in certain Muslim societies.

"Unfortunately, in some societies in the Muslim world, scant attention is given to the women and youth, a worrying trend that can prove and has already proven detrimental to the development of Muslim societies."

Najib said there was a lack of representation of women in certain Muslim societies, thus giving rise to gender marginalisation and confining women solely to the pri-



Datuk Seri Najib Razak (right) talking to World Islamic Economic Forum's Businesswomen and Young Leaders' Forum chairman Datuk Norraesah Mohamad during his tour of an exposition held in conjunction with the event at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday. — Bernama picture

ivate domain and depriving their rights to contribute to the development of society.

He said youths were also deprived of their rights to assume leadership responsibilities and to voice innovative opinion.

"Our communities are becoming more fragmented, and traditional support for women and youths are no longer as readily available as they once were.

"This makes it vital that we develop ways to ensure women and young people receive the guidance and support they need."

Najib also said women and

young people giving their time and energy to positive causes like grooming and mentoring were vital to building Muslim communities' social capital.

"Social capital is about women and young people not living as isolated units, but recognising that we are all part of our community and have something to contribute to that community."

Najib also stressed the importance of small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in the development of an economy.

He said a recent *Forbes* report had concluded that SMEs consti-

tute a major component of a country's gross domestic product.

"Coupled with the nature of women as trustworthy and credit-worthy entrepreneurs, a special focus on SMEs will certainly be a big boost for the development of these enterprises in the Muslim world," he added.

Themed "Nurturing our Best Resources — the Women and the Youth of the Muslim World" the one-day forum was attended by participants from Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Morocco, Pakistan, Uganda and Britain.