

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	6/9/2017

IDEAS TO MOVE FORWARD

# To see trees, plant the seeds now

NSP  
-6/9/2017  
Pg. 5

TN50 dialogue on women's issues gives a glimpse of what is needed for the fairer sex to excel in the next 30 years

LAILI ISMAIL  
KUALA LUMPUR  
news@nst.com.my

**T**HE voices of Malaysian women from all walks of life were loud and clear during the National Women's Day celebration that coincided with the inaugural Global Women's Trade Summit 2017.

The two-day event, beginning yesterday and themed "Women: Changing the global economy", saw thought leaders from the country and abroad, including successful entrepreneurs and esteemed corporate figures, sharing their views and experiences with a diverse group of delegates.

The event at Berjaya Times Square Hotel here also saw Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak taking centre stage, along with Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim, during a National Transformation 2050 (TN50) dialogue session.

During the session, co-organised by the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry and the Malaysian chapter of the International Women's Federation of Commerce and Industry (IWFCI), 18 women from various target groups voiced their concerns, hopes and aspirations on the road to TN50.

Among the issues were the vulnerability of women in the job market as the country braces for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as well as gender equality.

A representative of the National Council of Women's Organisations Malaysia urged the government to aggressively invest in the right ecosystem for women when cultivating the country's one million

workforce requirement in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) field.

"The focus should be on up-skilling women, who are under-represented in the STEM field, so they will not lose their jobs tomorrow, and we know this is a reality."

"Women make up 85 per cent of purchasing decisions and contribute RM20 trillion in consumer spending. (Hence), women are your target and solution," she said to the prime minister.

Despite the government's efforts to elevate women in the workforce and encourage their contribution to the nation's economy, persistent gaps still exist.

"We must push for non-discrimination and gender equality, and we need to make the changes now."

"To see the trees, we must plant the seeds now."

"There is a raft of critical issues that must be addressed to ensure that women are free from all forms of direct and indirect discrimination. There is currently an unconscious bias that impede women from succeeding," she said, citing domestic abuse, sexual harassment and child marriage as issues that hinder the progress of women.

The delegate also urged the government to ensure that the ban on unilateral child conversion be instituted so that it can put into place a more holistic framework towards achieving gender equality.

A Maybank employee, who represented women in the corporate field, called for the 90-day paid maternity leave in the public sector to be extended to the private sector.

Currently, under the Malaysian Employment Act 1955, nursing mothers are entitled to a minimum of 60 days paid maternity leave.

"In my capacity as a chairman of



Prime Minister' Datuk Seri Najib Razak speaking at the TN50 dialogue session during the National Women's Day celebration in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him on stage is Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim. PIX BY YAZIT RAZALI



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, with winners of the 'Winnovation Competition'.

Malaysia Commercial Bank Association, I notice that more maternity leave for mothers will not cause productivity to decrease. In fact, it increases performance."

She also proposed the setting up of a small claims tribunal to "cut the red tape" when dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace.

Women with different disabilities also expressed their hopes and dreams for TN50, and called for improved facilities to help them be mobile and earn a livelihood.

"We need better facilities and network for women with different abilities so that we can contribute to the country's economy. I am a civil servant and I notice that basic facilities for us are still severely lacking."

"We also like the government to revise its allowance for women with disabilities to uplift our position in society. It is not sympathy that we want, but moral and financial support, so we may inspire others who are not beset with physical or mental disabilities," she said to rapturous applause.

The plight and dreams of women from other groups, such as single mothers, the homeless, volunteers, rural residents, healthcare workers and construction industry players also had their concerns heard.

A pre-engagement session hosted by Rohani preceded the dialogue session, during which the minister told the women participants to be more outspoken in stating how they perceived the country to be in 30 years time.

She told a press conference after the event that 38 aspirations were noted, and women were encouraged to submit their hopes and dreams via email to the ministry at info@kpwm.gov.my.

In his winding up response, Najib took note of the concerns and highlighted the recent progress and achievements of Malaysian women.

He said the workforce saw an increase of female participation, with women making up 54.3 per cent last year, from 46.4 per cent when he first took office in 2008.

"In the education field, women make up 64 per cent of students in public higher-learning institutions

as of last year compared with 59.7 per cent in 2007.

"These are among the accomplishments made by Malaysian women that prove the saying 'when women succeed, a nation will also succeed'."

Najib said the government was committed to making real changes, especially in upholding gender equality and promoting women's development.

"Whatever we can do for the advancement of women, *insya-Allah* (God willing), we will do it. For example, the gender equality law in this country, which was suggested by Rohani, is worth considering."

"We will not tolerate any form of discrimination against women. Any form of harassment and intimidation toward women must be dealt through the law."

"I believe that such system will protect women, which is why we passed the law against domestic abuse, as 80 per cent of the cases involved women," he said before revealing that two to three items on women's development will be included in the upcoming 2018 Budget.

Closing the first day of the 3-in-1 event was the launch of the National Women's Day celebration and the IWFCI Summit 2017, which was accompanied by a spectacular drum performance by an all-women group.

The event also saw a prize-giving ceremony for the "Winnovation Competition", which was aimed at increasing the number of women innovators and entrepreneurs.

The winners were Dr Nazirah Ahmad in the "Inspirasi" category for producing the cup lump modified bitumen; Halimah Ab Rahim in the "Bakat Muda" category for inventing the onion peeler machine; and Fadilah Mohamad in the "Akar Umbi" category for coming up with the eco-friendly tie dye.