

**Women have big role in country's growth, says PM**  
**TheStarOnline**  
**March 10, 2012**  
**By ISABELLE LAI**

PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has lauded women's contributions to the country, saying that a large part of Malaysia's progress since independence was due to them.

He praised the leaps and bounds women had made in the past 50-odd years, including the education field, which he said had witnessed "remarkable growth" for women.

"Did you know that in 1959, only one out of every 10 local undergraduates was a woman? Today, more than six out of 10 first-class degree holders are women," he wrote in a blog entry entitled "Progress for Women, Progress for Malaysia," adding that today's challenge was increasing enrolment and retention rates for male students instead.

He said Malaysia had successfully closed the gender gap in economic development in tandem with its journey towards becoming a high-income fully developed nation.

"46.1% of Malaysian women are working today and we aim to increase this to 55% by 2015," said Najib, adding that the Government has always recognised the role of women.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the Grant Thornton International Business Report 2011 had ranked Malaysia joint 9th worldwide for the number of women-held senior management positions (31%).

"Even in Government, we have several women in top positions in the Securities Commission, International Trade and Industry Ministry, and the Central Bank, shaping economic and financial policies of the country," he said.

Najib expressed hope that young women would seek inspiration from successful Malaysians including the country's first female minister, the late Tun Dr Fatimah Hashim, United Nations for Peace-Building Support assistant secretary-general Judy Cheng-Hopkins, squash queen Datuk Nicol David and international actress Datuk Michelle Yeoh.

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