

PM: Women are equal partners in development
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MOVING FORWARD: Hard to find a Muslim nation with women as advanced as those in Malaysia, says Najib

PETALING JAYA: COMMITTED, dedicated and inspirational. These are some of the words that best describe some of the nation's most outstanding women at the Malaysian Women's Foundation First Lady Awards 2012 last night.

Held at the One World Hotel in Bandar Utama, the award, which was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, sought to honour and recognise exceptional women who had forged innovative paths and created leadership models for women to follow.

Najib had only high praise for Malaysian women in his speech.

"In Malaysia, women have achieved far more than men, especially in the field of education. When compared with other Muslim-majority countries, it is hard to find a Muslim nation with women as advanced as those in Malaysia."

Najib attributed the successes of women to the government's policies, which were non-gender restrictive and gave equal opportunity to both genders.

"The government has never prevented women from showcasing their skills and talents. Malaysian women are seen as equal partners in the country's development and the awards recognise women, who are pioneers, trailblazers or those who have shown great aptitude in their fields so they can be seen as icons to both women and the general public."

He advised women to strike a good work-life balance in their lives in order to do well at the many roles and the responsibilities they held.

Najib said he hoped that the awards would become a catalyst for bigger achievements for women.

MWF chairman Datuk Faridah Abu Hassan said the foundation would focus on realising the formation of a women's university in partnership with either a private university or college here.

She also pledged the foundation's continued support for Najib and Barisan Nasional in leading the country.

The recipients of the First Lady Awards 2012 included Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, the wife of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was awarded the First Lady Perdana Award for her work and role through serving Bakti -- an organisation that affected public life and furthered the general interests of women.

At another function in Kuala Lumpur later, Najib praised some 15,000 silat exponents, saying their strong spirit should be translated into votes in the coming general election.

He said their voices were crucial in defending the nation and upholding key pillars of the law.

"Your show of discipline is admirable and that same discipline is needed to uphold the country's future and peace.

"If you can do it, I don't see why there are certain quarters who cannot do the same," he said at the launching of 16th National Silat Championship and a national rally of silat exponents.

Najib stressed that respecting the rule of law was key in keeping Malaysia peaceful and harmonious.

"Otherwise, we only invite chaos here. This is why we have tabled bills (in Parliament) so that we can find balance between human rights, civil liberty and social interests," he added.

Earlier, the prime minister was presented the highest order of silat -- the "Laksamana Negara" award.

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