

**Women Should Play Lead Role If Countries Wish To Build Sustainable Economy -  
Najib  
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 6 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said women should play a lead role if countries wished to build economies that were both sustainable and successful.

The prime minister said advancing economic opportunities for women and girls "is not just the right thing to do but it is the smart thing to do".

"I believe that a country's success and stature should be gauged by the status it accords its women," he said, noting that in Malaysia, women had the right to vote since independence in 1957 and women had equal pay since 1969.

Opening the Global Summit of Women 2013 themed 'Women: Creating New Economies', in the capital, Thursday, Najib said the country had begun to move from "protection and representation" to "recognition and empowerment" of women.

"These victories belong to the men and women of Malaysia who have argued for greater equality, who have shown through their achievements that success is not just individually deserved, but brings benefits to all," he said.

Also present were Najib's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, President Atifete Jahjaga of Kosovo and Vietnamese vice-president Nguyen Thi Doan.

Najib said he wanted to see more concerted efforts being done by the public and private sectors to create work environments that retained and re-attracted women's participation in the workforce.

He shared with his audience the World Bank's estimation that between 500,000 and 2.3 million Malaysian women made the choice to leave the world of work to care for their children, aged parents or family members.

"For too many women, a work environment that is not family-friendly is simply not sustainable, and so we're wasting talent, experience and potential. It's one of the most serious brain drain that we must address," he said.

Najib said over the next three years, the government aimed to increase the rate of women labour participation to 55 per cent, a target that could be achieved if both the public and private sectors could commit to keeping talented people that were leaving the system too early.

For the public sector, Najib said this might require a review of rules and regulations that were written when the work environment was different and there was no access to technology for telecommuting and video-conferencing.

"So my challenge to the Malaysian public service is this; let's work together to look at the changes that can help talented women re-enter the service. There's no time like the present," he said.

To encourage the private sector to take up the challenge, the prime minister said the

government had introduced a double tax deduction incentive for companies which retrained and employed women after a career break.

"And I've challenged the corporate sector to ensure women make up at least 30 per cent of senior decision-making positions and corporate boards, including in government-linked companies and various commissions, by 2016."

Najib highlighted the fact that the National Institute for the Empowerment of Women, under its women directors training programme, had trained more than 300 women who were ready to take up positions on the corporate boards.

He said that people must recognise that care work was not the domain of women alone as men too had to step up and share this responsibility when they could, allowing women the same opportunities to prioritise their career.

Over 1,000 participants from about 70 countries are taking part in the three-day summit which, during its two-decade history, has provided a global platform for women to share "what works" in accelerating women's economic advancement.

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