

## **BCorp supports women participation across industry**

WOMEN have been contributing over 55% of the nation's economy, according to the **Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM)**.

In 2020 alone, women in Malaysia contributed RM776.9 billion to the nation's development.

However, DoSM found that the women's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for 2020 was at 55.3% which is significantly lower than neighbouring countries like Thailand (66.8%) and Singapore (69.7%).

Previously, Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz said it will be compulsory for all major companies to have one female director on their board by September 2022, and for all other listed companies by January 2023 which could be a stimulant to push for female representation.

In support of the government's call to have 30% women participation in various sectors of the industry especially in the top management position, Berjaya Corp Bhd (BCorp) discussed the why's and how's behind what is holding back the female workforce through the "In Thin Air" roundtable last Friday.

Addressing topics often considered taboo in a corporate climate were guest speakers BCorp's independent non-ED Datin Seri Sunita Mei-Lin Rajakumar, Norlela Baharudin, Penelope Gan Paik Ling and Dr Jayanthi Naidu G Danasamy.

The main topics were the obstacles women face to be recognised and credited for their work, sexual harassment and gender discrimination, and the impossible requirement of a working woman to be both 100% at work and home for the family. Sunita said businesses should have a diversity of views in decision making.

"If there is a systemic bias in the organisation, is management doing what's in the best interest of the business?"

"We have a subconscious bias that seems to intent to look a certain way and sometimes it becomes self-perpetuating. We need to be constantly open to new views and that includes ensuring that there isn't a systemic bias in the workplace," she said.

Whenever women are on top, there will always be a perception that a woman is there for a token of representation. Gan, on the other hand, thought that women are there for their ability and qualification.

"When you have vision but no action it becomes a dream, when you have action but no vision it is a nightmare, but when you have vision and you have action it will change the world.

"As a woman, when someone puts you on a board just for the sake of putting you on the board and you want to make a change, your effort has to come and you have to prove yourself," she said.

Meanwhile, Norlela believed that Malaysia is slowly progressing with talks about minimum wage being reviewed and amendments to the Employment Act. She also believed that the efforts need to be hastened and to happen more often instead of a one-off move.

“Changes must be drastic as they come very slowly.

“To date there are 27% women on the board of the top 100 companies listed on Bursa while for over 900 public listed companies, the ratio is only 17%,” she added.

On the other hand, Jayanthi said it might be easier for her to get on the board due to her doctorate title.

“To younger women, I’d say go for it and use your credibility and qualifications to push yourselves into those leadership positions,” she said.

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