
Interview Request by Shivani, Journalist from The Sun
Wednesday, 10 March 2021

1. The number of women holding senior leadership positions in Malaysia has hit 37% this year, the highest ever recorded despite the Covid-19 pandemic affecting economies around the world, according to Grant Thornton's annual Women in Business report. What are your opinions on this increase seeing that we are still in a male dominated society?

As Malaysia continues on its journey to keep women in the workforce, numbers reflected in reports like this are a good tracker.

However, as encouraging as this may all be, it is easy for the ground beneath us to slip and for all gains won, they are all easily lost. In an ideal world, we would like to increase the percentage to 50%, equal opportunity to both men and women, and we should continue to pursue this goal at every opportunity.

Diversity in leadership is good for business. In Malaysia diversity is a recognized strength. Many organizations have set up internal structures to encourage more women to take on leadership roles, to help them build their confidence and most importantly, nurture their mindsets to achieve their goals and dream bigger. Much, much more is needed to enable an environment for women to flourish and companies actions lie at the heart of this.

2. Are there government policies, from the previous and existing government, that could have led to this?

To the best of my knowledge there has never been any debate on whether there should be an increase in the number of women holding senior leadership positions in Malaysia by the government. We have seen a consistent push by the Malaysian government, both through its policies and appointments of women, especially in the civil service and GLCs.

Policy-wise, the 10-year Economic Transformation Programme which was driven by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), stated its commitment in meeting the 30 per cent target for representation of women in decision-making positions. Following this, the Malaysian Chapter of the 30% Club was set up in 2015 to support the government's target, and they have been working towards getting 30% representation of women on the boards of Malaysian GLCs and Top 300 PLCs.

As for appointments, in 2018 we saw an increase in not just female ministers, but also female representation in key institutions including Malaysia's first female chief justice, Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat; its first female deputy prime minister, Dr

Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and its first female anti-corruption chief commissioner, Latheefa Koya.

3. Are women finally given recognition due to the previous outstanding achievements from female role models such as Datuk Nicol Ann David and the many more amazing women out there? What are your opinions on this?

Malaysia is filled with many not just capable women but many that excel in their fields of interest - often they are far too busy doing the work and do not make time to tell their stories. With today's social media platforms and with attentive colleagues and friends in their support system, we are starting to uncover these unsung stars.

Showcasing successful Malaysians, especially women, is important; it provides role models for generations to come. When their stories are infused with the setting of goals, integrity and compassion, laced with character and behaviors, it allows those that are rising to imagine themselves in that position, emulate positive traits and to look for pathways that suit their own trajectory.

It should also be noted that women tend to react differently from men when complimented for their achievements. They often internalize their reaction and be somewhat dismissive - they could probably do better at bragging a little bit more!

4. In certain fields, do women outdo men? If so, what are these fields in terms of business?

It has come to light recently during the COVID-19 pandemic that women leaders are doing a better job across the board. In terms of leadership assessment, a study by the Harvard Business Review has shown that women are rated more effective as leaders than men, and the gap has increased in the pandemic. This is a possible indication that women tend to perform better in a crisis. It was interesting to note, the breakdown of leadership competencies shows that men are rated more positively only on aspect - technical / professional expertise and even then the difference is not significant.

Women today are making significant strides into roles that have been typically male dominated, from taxi drivers to pilots, engineering, aerospace and leadership positions in large multinational companies. Mobility and freedom to move states or countries with their families into these roles (which often requires a choice for their partners), are important factors of success if they want to be globally competitive.

At AMCHAM's webinar celebrating International Women's Day on the theme of **The Opportunity for Women in a Digitized World**, we spoke of how technology can certainly open new doors and areas for women. However, it is human factors like the culture of the workplace, of colleagues coupled with the openness of hiring

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staff that needs to adapt and embrace inclusion before diversity can be fully adopted.

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ABOUT AMCHAM MALAYSIA

The American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) was founded in 1978 as an international, non-profit, private-sector business association. It comprises more than 1200 members representing about 280 American, Malaysian and other international companies with strong ties to American business. The Chamber is a member of the AmChams of Asia Pacific.

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