General

SheLeads 2026 platform empowers women’s talent and leadership development

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BANDAR ENSTEK, 22 June 2026 – Women’s leadership continues to be elevated as an important agenda in national development through the launch of the SheLeads 2026 programme, officiated by the Director-General of Higher Education, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Datuk Professor Dr. Azlinda Azman, who represented the Minister of Higher Education, Yang Berhormat Dato’ Seri Diraja Dr. Zambry Abd Kadir, at the Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT).

Also present were SheLeads Advisor and Member of the AKEPT Advisory Board, Tan Sri Zarinah Anwar, and Director of the Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT), Professor Dr. Harshita Aini Haroon.

According to Datuk Professor Dr. Azlinda, based on UNESCO data, women represent approximately 45 per cent of the academic workforce worldwide.

“However, women remain underrepresented in senior leadership positions, with only about 30 per cent of key leadership positions globally held by women.

“The higher education landscape in Malaysia reflects a similar challenge, as only two of the 20 public universities (UA) are led by women Vice-Chancellors.

“Meanwhile, in the polytechnic and community college sector, women hold only 22 of the 96 institutional/divisional director positions nationwide,” she said.

She further explained that this leadership gap is not merely an issue of equality.

“It reflects talent potential that has yet to be fully utilised and limits the diversity of perspectives needed for effective governance and institutional excellence,” she said.

She expressed appreciation for AKEPT’s commitment in taking the initiative to introduce SheLeads, a national leadership platform aimed at developing, connecting, and empowering women academics and administrators in Malaysian higher education institutions.

The programme also featured a forum entitled ‘Leading Beyond Boundaries: Women Leaders as Catalysts for Change’, which brought together prominent women figures and experienced corporate leaders to share insights, experiences, and strategies for empowering women as agents of change across various sectors.

The forum featured Professor Ts. Dr. Yatimah Alias, the sixth Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA) and the first woman appointed to lead UMPSA.

She also made history as one of the youngest professors at Universiti Malaya (UM) when she was appointed Professor in 2010 at the age of 40.

As an academic and researcher, she is recognised as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry (FRSC) and was listed among the World's Top 2% Scientists by Elsevier–Stanford University in 2024.

Guided by the values of integrity, excellence, innovation, and talent development, Professor Ts. Dr. Yatimah aspires to position UMPSA as the Advanced TVET Hub in Asia Pacific by 2030 and a globally renowned technical university.

According to Professor Ts. Dr. Yatimah, in a world filled with uncertainty, values serve as a compass that guides our decisions, encompassing resilience, courage, empathy, and authenticity.

"Women today must have the courage to seize opportunities in leadership, technology, and education and be prepared to face future challenges.

"Efforts to empower women also require continuous commitment from organisations, educational institutions, and policymakers to ensure that equitable opportunities can be created," she said.

The forum also featured Yang Berbahagia Datuk Zunaidah Idris, Founder and Vice-Chairman of the Women Leadership Foundation (WLF).

She is a prominent corporate and women's leadership figure with more than 30 years of experience in investment banking, capital markets, and strategic planning.

Her expertise is demonstrated through her ability to lead teams in navigating major financial challenges and building strong relationships with industry, stakeholders, and professional institutions.

In addition to serving as an Adjunct Professor at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), an HRDCorp accreditation trainer, and a member of advisory panels for various organisations, she is also actively involved in bridging academia, industry, and talent development.

Her contributions through the Women Leadership Foundation, the Women Leadership Endowment Fund at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and various women's leadership initiatives, including programmes such as Sarawak Women of Tomorrow, which has mentored more than 50 women from 17 companies, demonstrate her strong commitment to empowering women leaders and the younger generation.

Chief Growth Officer (CGO) of the Institute of Corporate Directors Malaysia (ICDM), Zadil Hanief Mohamad Zaidi, also served as a panellist at the forum.

Zadil has more than 25 years of professional experience across various sectors, including property development, the public/philanthropic sector, consumer products, strategy consulting, and oil and gas.

His expertise encompasses strategy execution, organisational transformation, and strategic communications.

He has also served as a board member of several subsidiaries of publicly listed entities and has been

directly involved in several transformation programmes at the national and corporate levels.

The forum also featured the Chief Executive Officer of SpaceIn Sdn. Bhd., Dr. Norilmi Amilia Ismail, an aerospace engineer, entrepreneur, and educator specialising in satellite-based internet of things (IoT) systems and small satellite technology.

She currently serves as a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and as Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SpaceIn Sdn. Bhd., where she leads the development of low-cost nanosatellite IoT solutions that provide connectivity for various sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas.

In 2023, SpaceIn successfully launched its first technology demonstration satellite into space aboard a SpaceX rocket.

The forum session was conducted by the UM Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International), Professor Dr. Yvonne Lim Ai Lian, while AKEPT Deputy Director, Associate Professor Dr. Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan, served as co-moderator.

During the forum, the panellists emphasised that women's leadership is not only important in strengthening organisations but can also bring new perspectives that are more inclusive, innovative, and resilient in addressing global challenges.

They also shared their experiences in navigating various career challenges and highlighted the importance of building support networks and a workplace culture that supports women's talent development.

The SheLeads 2026 programme, involving 44 participants and ten mentors, serves as a platform to encourage women's leadership development, strengthen professional networks, and foster a culture of excellence among future leaders.

The forum also served as a platform for exchanging ideas and best practices in empowering women as catalysts for change capable of creating a positive impact on society and the nation.

The organisation of SheLeads 2026 reflects MOHE's continued commitment through AKEPT, in collaboration with UM and the Institute of Corporate Directors Malaysia (ICDM), to developing credible and competitive leaders who are prepared to lead change in line with the aspirations of the nation's higher education development.

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