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Cutting age?

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NEW blood.

This was the point of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's announcement in early July that Umno was to set up a younger women's wing.

After all, the need to draw young Malays into Umno has been talked about by him and others concerned about the future of the party for some time now.

Yet a brouhaha has erupted giving the impression that some quarters within Umno are sourly resisting the formation of the new wing, Puteri Umno.

The debate is centred on the content and structure of the new proposed entity.

From this, two views have emerged, one which takes a cautious, through-the-mill approach while the other favours a straight-to-the-point route.

A chronology of events since the PM's announcement has given us a glimpse of grievances bubbling beneath the surface.

On July 10, the party president announces the setting up of a new wing, Pasukan Puteri Umno which will be similar to Umno Youth. Members will be aged 40 and below.

Two days later, Deputy Prime Minister and deputy president of Umno, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, welcomes feedback from young party members on the setting up the wing. He also said that Wanita chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz could suggest the new structure and regulations.

On July 21, supreme council member Azalina Othman Said submitted a paper proposing the structure and content of Puteri Umno to four key leaders of the party.

On July 22, Rafidah says that the age of eligibility should be reduced from 40 to 30.

On Sept 3, Rafidah counter-proposes that Puteri Umno should co-exist as a club, and its members should be aged from between 18 and 35.

Ten days later, a letter from one Khadija Jamaluddin appears in the New Straits Times, expressing great disappointment over the intention to reduce Puteri Umno to a club.

On Sept 22, Wanita division heads met to discuss Azalina's proposal, which sources say was not well-received.

Then, on Oct 7, PM reiterated that Puteri Umno would be on par with Umno Youth, while addressing Malaysian students in Manchester. He was reported to have also said: "Young Malay women are not getting places in Wanita whose members are mostly old and already have a solid political stature."

On Oct 9, Rafidah says that if there is no choice, Puteri Umno will function as a wing, but members' age should be limited to between 18 and 25.

On Oct 11, Abdullah meets with Wanita Umno Exco members and says that a consensus has been reached on Puteri Umno. Sources say that the age will be limited to 30 and below, because, according to Wanita, "at 40, women are no longer puteri".

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