

# Kudos to Puteri

Nov - 6 AUG 2007

**P**UTERI Umno, the young woman's wing of Umno, was officially launched by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Friday at the Putra World Trade Centre.

It was the culmination of months of hard work by Puteri's originator, lawyer Azalina Othman Said, and members of her pro tem committee.

The idea of a junior wing for women came about after the 1999 general election in response to the shift in Malay support, in particular the youth, from Umno to Pas.

Among the reasons cited for Umno's disappointing performance in the elections was the exodus of young Malay voters from the party to Pas.

Credit must be given to Azalina and her team for the idea. It was their answer to the widespread criticism that young educated Malays were ungrateful and had been misled into supporting the Opposition.

Despite the acknowledgement that Umno lost the support of young Malays in the 1999 elections and Malay students in universities and colleges were leaning towards the Opposition, Azalina's **baby** was nearly stillborn.

Some elements in Wanita, the women's wing of Umno, were not pleased with the idea. They feared that Puteri would compete with Wanita and cause confusion among members and supporters.

More than that, the traditionalists in Umno, men and women alike, were spooked by the youthful enthusiasm and the outspokenness of Puteri's promoters.

For a long time the party elders were not used to being spoken to, except probably at the annual general assembly. More so being told that they could be way out of range in their efforts to reach out to young educated Malays.

For more than a decade the handling of youth affairs, including reaching out to students and members of the intellectual community, was "franchised" to the former deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

**A**S students of history and politics will immediately sense, Umno will be in trouble if young educated Malays feel that they are being alienated or if Umno's policies and practices are seen as not being in tune with the times.

Umno, until the last general election, had successfully drawn the youth to its side. The majority of its leaders started with the party when they were youths.

Azalina and her youthful team, I believe, have learnt a useful lesson *jangan tunjuk pandai*. Despite their worldly outlook, many Umno leaders are still unable to ac-

cept the fact that young people have as much right to speak up and to act.

Personally, I am pleased that Puteri Umno has been finally inaugurated. In the Oct 13, 1996 column, when reviewing the turmoil in Umno Youth following the ouster of Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tambv Chik, I wrote:

"In today's gender-sensitive environment and at a time when women are playing an increasingly important role in nation-building, why should the youth wing be the exclusive domain of young men?"

"What about the young women? Instead of Pemuda Umno, why can't Pemuda-Pemudi Umno or simply Umno Muda or Young Umno?"

Well, it seems that Azalina and her team have a better idea and stronger resolve. I congratulate them.

As for the MCA Youth, whose acrimonious extraordinary general meeting on Friday climaxed in chair-throwing and a walkout by some 500 delegates, I hope its troubles will be over soon.

## OTHER THOTS

By A. Kadir Jasin

some, it has become a status symbol

Two weeks ago, I wrote briefly in this column about the suggestion by Chinese tycoon Datuk Tan Chin Nam of the Tan and Tan fame that restaurants cease serving shark's fin soup.

What I had not said was Tan's warning that a large number of Chinese would oppose the idea. But he said Malaysia would score points if it too, banned or discouraged the consumption of threatened animal and plant species.

It is refreshing to hear a Z-year-old Chinese tycoon advocating conservation. This is one of the positive aspects of progress — Malaysians, young and old, are beginning to accept the message of conservation.

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The MCA had so many things going for it after its sterling performance in the 1999 elections until it decided to take control of Nanyang Press Holdings, the publishers of *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press*, several months ago.

Fortunately for the MCA, its rival the Democratic Action Party (DAP) is not in brilliant shape either. Internally, the three-decade long leadership of Lim Kit Siang is being questioned while the party's landmark partnership with Pas is in jeopardy over the latter's insistence on "*Negara Islam*" (Islamic state).

**T**O eat or not to eat? That is the question we may want to consider if we believe that God's other creatures have as much right to perpetuate their species as we do.

It concerns the love of a segment of our society for shark's fin soup.

Like most things Malaysian, the love for shark's fin soup is no longer confined to the Chinese.

In recent decades, thanks to economic progress and the emergence of *halal* Chinese restaurants, even the Malays have acquired the taste for the delicacy. For

Since then, the newspapers have reported a similar call by Sahabat Alam Malaysia president S.M. Mohd Idris.

In the same column, I mentioned that my 76-year-old padi farmer father in Kedah blamed the recent haze on the cutting down of the forest.

He too, had answered the conservation call. Sound advice can change even a *keras kepala* (hard-headed) old man like my father.

Since "retiring" from farming, he spends his time growing herbs and trees that he once destroyed to enlarge his padi field so that he could feed his eight children.

Thanks to the fact that he affords fuel and electricity, he has not been cutting down trees for firewood for a good three decades now. If he needs firewood to prepare food for a *kenduri* (feast), he buys discarded rubber wood from a nearby timber mill.

He received much of his conservation ideas from my politically adventurous younger brother who had gone through Abim, Pas and the now-defunct Semangat '46 before finally pledging support for Umno following Anwar's sacking. He finds saplings of rare herbs and plants for my father.