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Kudos to Puteri Umno team

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PUTERI 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 off course 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.