

11/04/2001

Monumental task ahead for Azalina and her team in new wing

Nuraina Samad

IT'S a dirty job but somebody has got to do it. And that job landed on the lap of lawyer Azalina Othman Said, a political neophyte but one with the enthusiasm to match her single-minded aim to make a change and a difference in Umno.

Of course, nobody said it was easy to put together a political movement that is to be part of a battered old political party.

But then it was Azalina, an appointed Umno supreme council member, who prepared a working paper for the establishment of a political movement for young Malay women.

It was rumoured that she submitted the paper directly to Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Her big sisters and the elders in Wanita Umno were not amused. They were caught by surprise and were naturally, offended.

Of course, it did not help that Wanita Umno was referred to as a movement of makcik-makcik (old ladies) which was unappealing to the young.

Whether or not this was true, the fact remained that Azalina was close to getting the chilly treatment from the veterans who, on record expressed support and denied any mistreatment or lack of sportsmanship.

This is all in the past. Azalina who was made Puteri Umno pro-tem head has overcome the unenviable task and good old-fashioned politicking that accompanied her entry into big-time politics.

This 37-year-old "upstart" who supposedly lacked Umno experience and credentials has got things going.

Known in legal circles as intelligent, Azalina has banded together seven young Malay women to represent a cross-section of society. Eleven have been named by the respective State Umno liaison committees. (Only Pahang and Kedah have yet to name their representatives.)

On Monday, she announced the line-up, among whom was popular artiste Erra Fazira whose real name is Fazira Wan Chik. Undoubtedly, her inclusion is causing a stir.

The others are said to be graduates, professionals and educationists.

They represent that breath of fresh air in Umno which has reached middle-age and earned a reputation as a fuddy-duddy party.

Certainly, the pro-tem Puteri Umno committee looks good and refreshing. Whether or not it can attract the "right kind" of young Malay women remains to be seen.

It looks like Erra's inclusion in the committee is meant to pull in the numbers, given her popularity. Erra herself appears to be serious and committed. She probably has more fans than some political leaders. (Hello, people pay to hear her sing, okay?)

On that basis, Puteri Umno would have no problem attracting members.

Some say Erra's inclusion is a gimmick.

"Well, it is one of the easiest things to do. Just get a celebrity to attract people. You don't have to think hard to come up with this," said a young civil servant.

A young bank officer said Umno has run out of ideas, adding that having an artiste in the Puteri line-up was "silly". She also said she would not join the movement because of that.

But another young Malay woman said that the youthful look of Puteri Umno is appealing.

"It is a good mix ... Erra will pull in a different set of young women,

the others will attract other groups. I have no problem identifying with the movement," she said.

The setting up of Puteri Umno was announced in July last year. Azalina, arguably faced many trials and tribulations in her single objective of helping Umno in its rejuvenation process.

Puteri Umno's raison d'etre is to help increase Umno's membership by getting young Malay women to join the movement.

Azalina is working on this and is targeting 1.5 million members in her soon-to-be-launched recruitment drive.

Umno is banking on Puteri Umno to help change the perception that the party has lost touch with the young.

Azalina and her girls have a monumental task ahead. They probably know by now they need more than a pretty face to convince that section of young Malaysians to have faith in and give support to Umno.

(END)