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Puteri Umno members ready to enter the big-time politics

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PUTERI Umno has progressed much since its formation and is set to make great strides in Malaysian politics.

According to the movement's chief, Azalina Othman Said, the members are now more exposed to the real world of politics and prepared for the challenges ahead.

Certainly, the movement's preferred colour of pink is deceptive. It may be feminine but make no mistake, Puteri Umno members going gusto to help the Barisan Nasional in the Likas State by-election in Sabah showed that they are no delicate young things.

Starting with a focus on non-political and service-oriented activities such as blood donation campaigns, sports activities and visits and assistance to the underprivileged, this movement is now into big-time politics since its members' involvement in the Likas by-election.

Critics will have to agree that Puteri Umno's participation in the BN campaign in Likas was not as a mere spectator.

Many witnessed their seriousness, zeal and enthusiasm.

Azalina said Puteri members have gained valuable political experience.

"Previously, they only listened to what top leaders had to say without having to turun padang which is a different experience altogether. Imagine having to go up against seasoned campaigners."

Azalina, the ebullient leader of the movement, said that Puteri members have, over the months, learnt the ropes, slowly but surely.

"They now have a better picture of what they ought to do and the responsibility which comes along with their position," she said in an interview with the New Straits Times.

The idea to establish Puteri Umno was announced by Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on July 10 last year to attract young professionals who want to join Umno but are not interested in being a part of Wanita Umno which they perceive as being "too old".

The formation of Puteri Umno was among the resolutions passed at Umno's one-day special assembly last November to amend the party constitution.

The supreme council had on March 31 this year announced Azalina's appointment as Puteri Umno pro-tem head.

Azalina said Puteri Umno has progressed after starting off on a rather "rough path". Members are moving fast with a great political sense and awareness on their roles and responsibilities.

"But of course Puteri Umno leaders have to constantly remind the members of their ultimate aim to develop a strong relationship with society.

"Our members vary from those who are really serious about politics to those who just want to contribute to the community. We have to train them and make them realise that they have an important role to play in society."

Azalina, who is also an appointed supreme council member, said Puteri Umno provides a forum for young women to voice out their opinions and a channel for them to be heard by the public.

"Through Puteri, the perception is changing. Young women now realise that they have an important role to play. They are now more aware of their rights."

Azalina said the movement was in the process of preparing itself to face the various challenges, after its rules and regulations have been discussed and approved by the supreme council at its next meeting.

Puteri Umno now has 165 divisions and will be forming the branches.

After chairing her first Puteri Umno central committee meeting in April, Azalina had said that the movement would launch a nationwide drive targeting some 1.5 million Malay women.

She said as Puteri Umno's pro-tem head she was a "mere custodian" and was ready to leave at anytime.

"I am not alone now as I have a lot of young Malay women and some of them are much better than me in the way they work and think.

"I just want to create more young women leaders so that I can pass it all to them to carry on to the next generation. That has always been my dream."

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