

01/11/2002

The `drama' is over and now Puteri assembly gets set to endorse Azalina

Ainon Mohd

YOUNG women clad in pink and white baju kurung will troop into the Putra World Trade Centre today for the inaugural general assembly of Puteri Umno.

A total of 660 delegates from 165 divisions as well as 2,000 observers are participating in the assembly, which is expected to be a tame affair as the movement's pro-tem chief, Azalina Othman Said, and pro-tem secretary Noraini Ahmad won uncontested when divisional meetings were concluded.

Azalina swept all the 165 nominations for the chief's post, while for the deputy chief's post two other contenders - Pahang pro-tem chief Shahaniza Samsuddin and Penang pro-tem chief Azlina Mehtab Mohd Ishaq - withdrew to make way for Noraini.

Azalina's four adversaries - former Puteri Umno information chief Mastina Abdul Hamid, Kulim/Bandar Baru Wanita division committee member Raihan Sulaiman, Seri Pandan branch chief Mazibah Md Zin and Hulu Klang Wanita member Ummi Hafilda Ali - failed to receive a single nomination.

Now the only significant contests are for the posts of chairman, deputy chairman and the 20 executive council seats.

Unlike the many Umno assemblies, this will be a straightforward one as its sole objective is to enable the young delegates to go through an election process.

However, to many, the assembly is simply to endorse her ascendancy to the top post.

Azalina's strong showing is a sign of the delegates' recognition of all her efforts in initiating the movement. This speaks volumes of her ability to motivate this large group of young women.

With no debates or motions to be tabled, the agenda will see party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Azalina delivering their speeches after which the elections for the remaining posts will take place.

Whatever one may say about Puteri Umno, it has emerged unscathed despite the feud between the opposing parties, allegations of threats, police reports, favouritism and last-minute stunts by some parties to gain support during the delegates' meetings.

The conclusion of the Puteri Umno divisional elections on Oct 16 saw 130 division heads returned unopposed and only 35 losing.

Perhaps, as predicted by political observers, the Puteri Umno delegates do listen to good advice and share a common concern with the rest of the party members - that the movement's unity reigns above other considerations.

They are now telling everyone that there is nothing wrong with the current pro-tem chief and that she will be given full support to run the movement.

What this shows again is that in the final analysis, it is the delegates who have the last say in the choice of leaders.

So what does the future hold for this young movement?

Party vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said the outcome showed that there is no truth to claims of "storms" in the new movement.

"Not even a breeze," he said.

Muhammad said it is now time to close ranks and members should gear themselves for the bigger and crucial battle - to bring young women to the political fore with a desire to participate not just in politics but also

in nation building.

"The defeated candidates should accept certain realities. Not winning the posts they vie for is not necessarily the end of the road. One can serve the party effectively by not holding any post," he said.

"Withdrawing from mounting a challenge and paving the way for a more dynamic candidate for the party's sake, is not a dishonourable thing to do."

Azalina is confident that the movement will become stronger.

"Another chapter has closed. Before long, everyone, the victors and the losers will work towards strengthening the movement. Puteri Umno will face more daunting challenges ahead but it will emerge stronger and wiser."

Indeed, taken positively, a greater pool of qualified young women should augur well for the future of the movement's leadership.

There are many talents around, some with the potential to become leaders in other, no less important fields.