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All eyes on Puteri Umno elections

Ainon Mohamed

BEING the youngest of the various wings in Umno, the Puteri inaugural election in November will attract much interest from those in-side and outside the party.

Its branch meetings which started on Aug 15 will elect delegates to the divisional meeting, who in turn elect their office bearers and two members to represent them in the movement's meeting scheduled for Nov 2.

The division head and her deputy will automatically qualify as delegates with two more elected to attend the meeting.

To date, more than 200 of the Puteri branches have conducted their meetings and reportedly were trouble-free.

The deadline for the conclusion of branch meetings is Sept 15.

The division meetings, scheduled to be held between Sept 15 and Oct 15, are crucial as they will determine the nominations for various posts.

The conclusion of the Puteri division meeting will see some 660 delegates chosen to attend the movement's inaugural election.

These delegates are deemed to be representing the wishes and aspirations of the 80,000 Puteri members nationwide.

Up for grabs are the top Puteri Umno chief post, the deputy's post, permanent chairman, deputy permanent chairman and 20 executive council positions.

Other posts are secretary, treasurer, information chief and five executive council seats.

But these are by appointments to be decided by the movement's chief.

Although there have been rumours that the current pro-tem chief Azalina Othman Said will be challenged, nobody has yet stated that they will take her on.

Azalina is seen as the favourite for the job.

Azalina and her pro-tem team have earned the admiration of not only Puteri members but also the party stalwarts.

To them, Azalina and the rest of the Puteri team have done a good job despite only being incorporated slightly over a year ago.

Many Umno leaders including Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib had openly stated that Azalina should be allowed to continue leading the movement.

There are many others too who predict that Azalina will win the post hands down even if there are challengers.

The pro-tem secretary Noraini Ahmad said this was not surprising as for the past one year, Azalina had proven to all that Puteri Umno was not an exclusive club only for the elite.

To her, Puteri Umno had come across as a platform for a new generation of young women to be involved in politics carrying a modern moderate image.

"As it is, the ground sentiments at the moment seems to be for Azalina.

"The fact is that Azalina is favoured largely on account of her credentials in leading the movement thus far," said Selangor Puteri Umno pro-tem chief Nora Azmin Redzuan.

It is also learnt that quite a number of aspirants had openly announced their decision to offer themselves for the deputy's post.

Among them are Puteri Umno Penang pro-tem chairman Azlina Mehtab Mohd Ishaq and Noraini herself.

A few Puteri division heads said others who have yet to offer themselves

for the deputy post but are said to be waiting to do so after being nominated are Pahang pro-tem chief Shahaniza Shamsuddin, Tenggara division chief Nor Haslina Zainal Abidin, the movement's information chief and also Negeri Sembilan pro-tem chairman Bibi Sharliza Mohd Khalid.

The party constitution states that candidates vying for any posts in the Puteri election must obtain at least two nominations to qualify to contest.

However, such a situation has many Umno figures worried.

They dread the idea that a scramble to contest for posts in the movement may be in store given the "easy" conditions imposed to qualify to contest.

However, a Puteri Umno division head was quick to point out that the likelihood of a big number of contestants was quite far-fetched.

"Generally Puteri Umno members are not those who are keen to fight for positions or hope to obtain something after winning," she added.

Another Puteri division head said:

"My hunch is that there will be no contest, maybe we will even see nominated candidates working out a compromise.

"There might be those who will withdraw their candidacy at the eleventh hour if there is request from the top," she said.

This aside, a more important concern in this election must surely be the objective of getting a line-up that is capable of taking Umno to greater heights and help shape the future of young women in the country.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a speech at a Puteri Umno gathering two days ago said being new, Puteri Umno must "be clean and be seen to be clean."

The Prime Minister also urged the young members to reject negative culture and values.

This, he said, included money politics and discrediting opponents.

In other words the choice of leaders should be based on the character of the candidate, their ability to perform and other leadership qualities.

Candidates for the upcoming Puteri elections must contest based on merit, free of any political drama, back-stabbing, bickering and ill-feeling towards each other.

As such, the Puteri Umno elections will surely put the new movement to the test.

May wisdom and foresight prevail at the Puteri elections.