

02/11/2002

`Allegations are political and I am not affected by them'

reports on "Puteri Umno Inaugural General Assembly" by Zubaidah Abu NEWLY-elected Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said has described the allegations against her as having been made with a political agenda and said that she is not affected by them.

She said that sometimes such an agenda would cause "certain words to be said and things to be done".

"What is relevant is the time the complaints were made. Everything came into the picture during the nomination period.

"The other thing is, the police have to start their investigation.

"One must not drag the police into one's political agenda. It is not fair. They have a lot of things to do, they have rape and murder cases to investigate. This is a waste of public funds," she said after delivering her speech at the movement's inaugural general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

This is the first time Azalina has spoken about the allegations made against her by a Puteri Umno member and aspirants for the post of movement's chief.

Azalina had refrained from making a statement on the allegations against her as the party had issued a gag order on the matter.

A Bahasa Malaysia tabloid, Perdana Sari, early this year "exposed" her sexual orientation.

Puteri Umno member Zalilah @ Elly Yusof then made a police report against her alleging misappropriation of Puteri Umno's assets.

Another police report was lodged two days ago, which contained allegations of a sexual nature.

Azalina said politics was not about making allegations but was about going to the grassroots and doing one's work.

She said the movement had a big responsibility ahead, especially in meeting the challenge set by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for it to increase its membership.

On whether she thinks that Dr Mahathir was defending her in his speech, Azalina said: "No, Dr Mahathir was just saying what everybody would say; that a person is innocent until proven guilty."

On whether she considered the allegation by Hulu Klang Wanita member Ummi Hafilda Ali as slanderous, Azalina said: "There are many things to consider before making allegations. But then, this is a free country."

(Ummi Hafilda was one of four aspirants for the post of chief who failed to secure any nomination to qualify to contest.)

On whether she will ask for a court injunction to stop Ummi Hafilda from making her allegations, Azalina said: "We'll see."

Earlier, in her speech, Azalina said she was fully aware that her presence to lead the movement was only for a short period to fulfil the wishes and aspirations of the new generation.

"Most important are Puteri Umno and Umno," she said, when addressing the delegates.

Speaking to the Press for the first time after winning the post of chief uncontested, Azalina said she was glad the process of forming the movement has reached this far, while the election process had been well-organised and conducted in a democratic manner.

"Praise to Allah that even with dissenting voices from so many sections, we have managed to go this far. I take all criticism positively, not only to improve myself, full of weaknesses (as I am), but also for Puteri Umno

and (Umno's) future."

In her speech, Azalina thanked all the delegates for nominating her as the only candidate for chief.

"Puteri has become mature at this tender age due to the many criticisms thrown at us," she said.

She added that the movement owed a great deal to Dr Mahathir, party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and party secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, "to name a few".

Azalina said Umno's move to establish the movement had given the younger female generation a platform to join mainstream politics.

"Instead of being anti-establishment, we, the younger generation are being pulled to participate in the country's development. All of this has made us mature."

Puteri Umno, Azalina said, was the bridge which connected the younger generation and the older generation.

"We are aware of our strategic role which complements that of the Youth and Wanita wings.

"Since our formation on April 9, last year we have been entrusted with the task of attracting young women to join the party.

Through our hard work and dedication, we have been successful in getting more than 93,435 new members to join Puteri."

"We will make it a two-way street to enable the older generation to relate to us.

"Puteri will be a critical and constructive political force. It will be the avenue to polish and create young budding stars in politics."

But Puteri's journey, she said, was still long and arduous and it needed all the support and help it could get from the various parties.

She said Puteri Umno was formed in an environment different from the older generation's.

"At this time, there are many successful Malays; Malays holding various degrees in their hand and holding top and important posts.

"At the same time, we are also witness to various scandals involving morals and misappropriation of funds among the political leaders.

"At this point of time also, Puteri can see that the Malays do not appreciate unity...

"The Malays must ask themselves if they are strong enough... Can they just let all this happen in front of them without stopping it?"