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Puteri's success a boost for women

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NOW that the question of the Puteri Umno leadership is somewhat settled, with pro-tem chief Azalina Othman Said being nominated by all 165 divisions as the new Puteri chief (NST, Oct 16), perhaps it's time to go past the political intrigue and take a second look at the movement to see the significance of its formation in strengthening the position of women in the country.

Whatever one may say about Puteri Umno, its formation has, for the first time in this country's history, brought young women to the political fore, with a desire to participate not just in politics but also in nation building.

The success of Puteri Umno thus far has encouraged other political parties and groups to consider a similar wing for their organisation, or at least a bigger role for their female members.

Many such organisations have been inspired by these young women who, apart from charitable activities and membership campaigns throughout the country, worked tirelessly alongside their Youth and Wanita Umno counterparts during the last few by-elections. The formation of similar bodies in the other parties, if it takes place, would be in line with the views of the nation's policymakers.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has on many occasions remarked on the significant increase of female students, graduates and professionals in the country, in comparison with their male counterparts.

It necessarily follows that such changes in the demographics and make-up of society requires a re-valuation of perceptions and attitudes. Clearly, as their numbers grow, their opinions and views will become increasingly important and worthy of attention.

It is imperative, therefore, that young women are given proper channels to express their opinions, and mechanisms are put in place to enable the country to harness the considerable pool of talent and skills that can be found within this group.

Therein lies the genius and foresight in the formation of Puteri Umno. Barely a year old, it has attracted thousands of young women - among them lawyers, doctors and engineers - to play a role in shaping the future of the country.

It can be said, therefore, that Puteri Umno is another significant symbol of the emancipation of women in Malaysia.

Of course, history will attest to the fact that Malaysia has always accorded its women due respect, and this is something all Malaysians should be proud of. We have always had able women leaders. Recently, a ministry for women was created.

Now that there is a collective awakening in our society to the growing significance of women outside the domestic sphere, and now that it has dawned upon us that women are starting to catch up, if not overtake, their male counter-parts in almost every field, it is hoped political parties representing all races will make an example of Puteri Umno and try to provide a platform for their young women to contribute towards nation