

**Make Wanita Umno BN's backbone, not its 'wing', says Shahrizat
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By Lisa J.Ariffin**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9 — Wanita Umno should be elevated to the status of the backbone of the party and Barisan Nasional (BN) rather than be considered a mere "wing", says its chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

The Wanita Umno chief said the title of "wings" does not reflect the major function of the women's group within the party and ruling coalition.

The Oriental Daily today quoted Shahrizat as saying the role of Wanita Umno should be affirmed as the backbone of the party as it was responsible for members and monetary contribution towards its general election machinery.

The former Cabinet minister also pointed out that party members needed to instil the responsibility of consolidating the people's trust in the government to ensure Umno's victory in the upcoming GE.

She noted the "care concept" was deeply rooted in daily lives of women, and referred to the group's charity programme Skuad Sayang (Care Squad).

"To reach the hearts of the voters, we must earn their respect. There must be discipline (among us). If we care for people, no matter what the situation, they will always be with us," she was quoted as saying by the Chinese-language daily.

"If we are responsible in performing tasks, they will respect us even until we are 80 (years). It is not about age and wealth, but what we contribute towards the upcoming general election," she added.

She also reminded party members to accept all candidates put forward by party leadership in the coming general election.

"It is impossible that with 1.3 million women in the party, there are no appropriate candidates. This concept must be corrected," Shahrizat said.

Wanita Umno is one of the party's strongest wings and has wielded a wide influence with women, especially in rural areas. But a shift in demographics due to industrialisation prompted Umno to set up a Puteri Umno wing to woo young women and professionals working in urban areas in the 1990s.

Shahrizat, a lawyer, lost her Lembah Pantai parliamentary seat in Election 2008 to Nurul Izzah Anwar. She was then made a senator and became the women, family and community development minister in April 2009 when Datuk Seri Najib Razak became prime minister.

However, Shahrizat's senatorship was not renewed last April and she lost her post in the Cabinet after her family was implicated in the scandal-hit National Feedlot Centre (NFC). The scandal was seen as a reason for a delay in calling elections which must be held by mid-2013.

Najib has indicated elections could be held as early as this November, citing his favourite number as 11. He is due to table the Budget 2013 this September 28 and analysts say the contents could provide clues for a snap poll or the possibility of BN going full-term.

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