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Umno-Sacked

SITI ZAINAB SACKED AS DEPUTY MINISTER AND SUSPENDED FROM UMNO

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5 (Bernama) -- Primary Industries Deputy Minister Siti Zainab Abu Bakar was today sacked from her post in connection with the missing RM1.8 million from the Wanita Umno accounts.

She was also suspended from Umno, Acting Prime Minister and acting party president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim announced after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting here.

Siti Zainab, 56, was Wanita Umno treasurer when the movement was led by Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

Also suspended from the party was Senator Habshah Osman, the movement's former secretary.

Anwar said the decision to sack Siti Zainab from her post and suspend her membership in the party followed a special inquiry into alleged misuse of the fund headed by Umno treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin.

The inquiry found Siti Zainab and Habshah responsible for closing the Wanita accounts and wrongfully transferring RM1.8 million from it without Rafidah's knowledge, Anwar said.

Siti Zainab, who is the Member of Parliament for Tebrau, is the first Malaysian woman to be a certified public accountant.

She was chairman of the Urban Development Authority and Pernas' Chief Accountant before being appointed deputy minister after the 1995 general election.

The Supreme Council also suspended former Melaka state executive councillor Datuk Sahar Arpan from all Umno posts pending completion of court hearing of three corruption charges against him.

"Tun Daim summoned Siti Zainab and Habshah twice to hear their explanation and appeal in connection with the Wanita Umno accounts," Anwar said.

Anwar said based on their statements to the inquiry, Siti Zainab and Habshah admitted responsibility in closing the accounts and transferring the money.

Replying to a reporter's question, Anwar said: "Their action was without the knowledge of former Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz."

Anwar said no further action was necessary against the two since Siti Zainab's sacking from the deputy ministership and suspension from the party with Habshah were based on an internal inquiry and not that by the Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) or the police.

"We take the initiative after getting information and the party committees and us acted within the means and powers of the party," Anwar said.

"Up to this juncture, I think there is no need for further action since the money was refunded and action has been taken. The other part of the money has already been accounted for and I was told it is in the process of being refunded," he said.

To another question, Anwar said: "To my mind the procedure was quite correct. I think the secretary-general made comparison earlier on that even for a small organisation. They would know for that matter, even at branch level, they would know the moment you are no longer office bearers, you have to transfer the property assets and accounts to the new elected office bearers."

"I don't think this is a very complex issue we are dealing with, but in order this problem does not recur, the treasurer has been asked to make

specific guidelines and procedures to be observed by office bearers at all levels," he said.

Anwar also announced the expulsion of two Kuala Selangor Umno members, Muhayat Mohd Yusuf and Hamzah Jalil, for supporting PAS in the recent Permatang state and Kuala Selangor parliamentary by-elections.

Meanwhile, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman declined to comment on today's Supreme Council's decision to suspend Siti Zainab and Habshah with immediate effect.

She merely said: "The inquiry and the action taken are party internal affairs. I'm happy that part of the money will be refunded."

The inquiry into the Wanita Umno accounts was announced by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after the April 12 supreme council meeting following a formal complaint.

At last month's supreme council meeting, Dr Mahathir said the council had identified the wanita leaders involved in the misuse of the money and had ordered for it to be refunded.

Dr Mahathir however did not name them as it was an internal matter but confirmed that past Wanita leader Rafidah and her successor Siti Zaharah were not involved.-- Bernama

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