

06/06/1997

Umno suspends Siti Zainab, Habsah

Kamarul Yunus

DEPUTY Primary Industries Minister Siti Zainab Abu Bakar was sacked from her post effective yesterday in connection with the missing RM1.8 million from the Wanita Umno accounts.

The former Wanita Umno treasurer's membership in the party has also been suspended.

The Umno Supreme Council, which met for about three hours yesterday afternoon, also suspended from the party Senator Habsah Osman, who is the movement's former secretary.

However, Siti Zainab will remain as Tebrau Member of Parliament and Habsah as Senator pending expiry of their respective terms.

Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the decision was taken after investigations into alleged misuse of funds, which was highlighted by the media in April.

Umno treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin, who headed a special committee to look into the case, had submitted a report to Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"After receiving the agreement of the party president and the Supreme Council, we decided to suspend Siti Zainab and Habsah's membership eventhough a big portion of the money has been returned," Anwar told reporters after chairing his first Supreme Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

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

Anwar said the investigations, overseen by Daim, found that Siti Zainab and Habsah were responsible for closing the Wanita accounts and wrongfully transferring RM1.8 million without Rafidah's knowledge.

Asked whether the case will be referred to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) or the police, Anwar said no other authorities will be involved as it was a party matter.

"This is an internal affair of the party... it is our decision. It will serve as a lesson to leaders of all levels."

The stern action, he said, is a reminder to the leaders not to take their responsibilities lightly or to ignore procedures. In a move to ensure that such a problem does not recur, the party's treasurer has been asked to prepare specific guidelines and procedures to be observed by all office bearers.

Asked whether the two can appeal, Anwar said: "They were responsible and admitted their responsibility."

On the duration of the suspension, Anwar said it is normally "quite long". He added that Daim had also told him that Siti Zainab and Habsah are in the process of returning the remaining portion of the missing RM1.8 million that was transferred.

Anwar said the Supreme Council has also suspended Durian Tunggal State Assemblyman and former Malacca State Executive Councillor Datuk Sahar Arpan from holding any positions in the party.

"He also cannot involve himself in any activities organised by the party pending the court's judgement although he has already stepped down as Malacca Umno liaison secretary," he added.

Sahar, who was arrested by the ACA on May 31, was charged at the Malacca High Court on June 2 on three counts of corruption relating to applications for two plots of land he allegedly approved between 1994 and

1995.

Also suspended are Encik Muhyat Mohd Yusof and Encik Hamzah Jalis - members from the party's Kuala Selangor division - for supporting opposition candidates in the Kuala Selangor parliamentary and Permatang state assembly by-elections, respectively.

The suspension of the five members came almost two months after the resignation of former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib on April 12.

Muhammad, the State Assemblyman for Batang Kali, faces charges filed at the Brisbane Magistrate Court for allegedly failing to declare the equivalent of RM2.4 million while leaving Australia on December 22 and for making a false declaration.

(END)