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Siti Zaharah: Nation should be top priority

ullah; Ramlan Said; Chok Suat Ling; Azrani Rustam; Shahrum Sayuti PLEDGING to unite the people to face the current economic problems, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman yesterday called on all quarters in the party to set aside personal interests and place the interest of the nation as their top priority.

She said the movement would also fight any attempt to politicise the current economic problem.

"Whatever the situation is, all quarters must be reminded that it is not the time for personal agendas which could derail our struggle to regain the dignity of the people, religion and nation," she added.

Speaking at the Wanita Umno general assembly, Siti Zaharah said Wanita Umno would remain united to defend the stability of the party, Government and country and fully support the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Towards this end, the movement has drawn up several programmes.

Siti Zaharah said Wanita Umno would work out a strategy to stimulate interest among women to make huge investments.

She said efforts would be made to set up a conglomerate to enable women to own equity in several strategic industries.

Among the areas being considered by the movement were manufacturing, modern agriculture, financial services and tourism sectors.

Siti Zaharah said the conglomerate, which would be formed through smart partnerships with professionals, would also concentrate on helping companies and small and medium-scale industries affected by the current economic problem.

She added the conglomerate would help companies and SMIs which needed fresh funds and "turn-around service" to revive their businesses.

"It has been our hope that the conglomerate will become a machinery where entrepreneurs and professional women are able to contribute positively and increase women's participation in the challenging new sectors," she added.

On the plan to help SMIs, Siti Zaharah said it should also come in the form of specific incentives to encourage exports.

The Wanita Umno chief also spoke on the success of Tabung Ehsan Wanita and Amanah Saham Wanita in inculcating the savings culture among women.

Another point raised by Siti Zaharah was the need to protect the Malay and Bumiputera participation in the banking sector.

"We are following the development in the banking sector which is now 40 per cent owned by foreign parties."

Siti Zaharah said Wanita Umno welcomed efforts to merge banks to strengthen the sector, but it had to be ensured that mergers would not be a "danger to the nation's interest".

She also called on the people to show greater patriotism by supporting local products and services and bringing back money kept overseas.

Siti Zaharah proposed "spin doctors" to counter adverse western reports on the country.

They would try to rectify the impression given by the west of the country.

On women's participation in decision making, Siti Zaharah said the movement would help to ensure more women were decision makers.

The movement was hoping at least 30 per cent of Members of Parliament, and senior administrators would be women, by the year 2005.

To achieve this, Wanita Umno would reward all parties which strove to increase women's participation.

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