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New line-up seems a re-shuffle heading right into a storm

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SUICIDE or strategy? Clean whisk of a surgeon's knife or a feeble attempt to cauterise a festering wound?

These are the questions reeling around the reshuffle yesterday of her line-up by Wanita chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Is this move which caught many, including some of the newly-appointed, by surprise, done after much thought and planning?

Or is she, as her critics are quick to say, digging her grave deeper?

"There should be no compromise," Zaharah had said in explaining her shock announcements. Her prime concern, she had said was the general election. "We have to brace for it."

Obviously, for those dropped, they were not braced for the fall. Is this then, ask her detractors, the right thing to do?

Many say she has not done the first thing a leader in her situation should have done - close ranks, and work as closely with everyone regardless of personal or party policy differences.

It is also known that this was the very directive from the Prime Minister himself, who met with the Wanita exco members last Friday.

He had specifically said that any problem was to be "put away in the freezer. You can heat them up later"

It is understood that he has also asked that they meet at least once in two weeks, and the party secretary-general, Tan Sri Khalil Yaacob, be present at these meetings.

The fact that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has seen fit to take charge is an indication, members say, that things are not in order in Wanita Umno.

"It is mind-boggling that Zaharah seems oblivious to all these.

"The reshuffle does not only seem to widen the divide, it also seems like an act of defiance," says a Wanita member.

Many said they were not questioning her right (to reshuffle) but her wisdom. And her timing.

Why now, when they should be concentrating on strengthening the election machinery.

Her choice of appointees has also raised questions. For one, some ask, why the need to drop Datuk Dayang Mahani Tun Pengiran Ahmad Rafaie.

"She is very influential in Sabah. This is just not the right move," said a Wanita member.

The choice of Mariany Mohd Yit as Wanita FT chief is also questionable because she is not an exco member. There are three women more qualified for this job. They are Senator Faridah Abu Hassan, Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil who is a Member of Parliament and a Supreme Council member and Dr Norraesah Mohamad who is an exco member.

The reshuffle in Penang has also created an awkward situation. Rokiah Bee Hassan, the new deputy chief, has also been made a Wanita exco member. Her new State chief, Senator Che Jam Harun, was not. Who takes precedence here?

For the newly-appointed, the promotions have also left them baffled.

"I thank the Wanita chief for appointing me but it would have been better if the reshuffle had been discussed first within the Wanita exco to avoid suspicion and speculation," said businesswoman Datuk Maznah Hamid, who was made the new head of the economics bureau.

"Likewise, although it is the prerogative of the Wanita chief to appoint

the Wanita head, secretary and treasurer at the State level, it would be more appropriate if she had a heart-to-heart talk with those involved and given reasons why they were dropped.

"Similarly, if you are demoted or sacked from your job, surely you would want to know the reasons. You would want to know what you have done wrong."

She said she could work with anyone within the exco and her main concern was strengthening unity in Wanita Umno, which was crucial in preparing for the coming general election.

Like many Wanita Umno members, Maznah feared that the reshuffle, done the way it was, could cause a rift within Wanita Umno. She said she was caught by surprise with the announcement when she caught it on television, although she did voice her interest in heading the economics bureau to Zaharah.

"But that was some time ago," she said.

Perhaps the only one not surprised was former FT chief, Azizah Abdul Samad. Azizah has also been replaced by Dr Noridah Ibrahim for the post of assistant treasurer in the central committee.

Being dropped was part and parcel of the "ups and downs" of politics, she said.

"I give my fullest support to the Wanita and party leadership whether I hold a position or not. I will continue to serve in any way I can."

Earlier, Azizah declined to comment on her being dropped from the new line-up, reasoning that it was not a good time with the coming general election.

"Just wait for the Prime Minister's statement after the Supreme Council meeting tomorrow," said Azizah who disclosed that 15 Wanita exco members met with Dr Mahathir today to discuss the effects of the reshuffle.

But she declined to divulge who the 15 exco members were.

All said, exco member Dr Norraesah Mohamad said "right now, gugur tak gugur, we cannot dwell on this. We have to work. What's uppermost is the election. We have to go to the ground and work hard ..."

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