

05/08/1999

Wanita chief withdraws proposed changes

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman has withdrawn her proposed changes to the movement's leadership announced on Monday, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister said Siti Zaharah made the decision at a meeting with him and party secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob yesterday.

"I gave my advice on the changes and she agreed to make the withdrawal to close ranks and strengthen the party for the general election.

"The line-up is now back to status quo," Dr Mahathir said at a Press conference after chairing a supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn here.

Dr Mahathir had also held a separate meeting yesterday with members of the Wanita Umno executive council on the matter.

The announced changes were supposed to take effect from Aug 16.

Siti Zaharah, who is Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, did not attend tonight's meeting as she was sick, Dr Mahathir said.

The meeting discussed the matter and, as she was absent, the council sought her confirmation on the withdrawal.

This was made in a telephone call by vice-president and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who assumed the duties of the deputy president.

Asked for the reasons for the withdrawal, Dr Mahathir said the changes had not gone down well with some members.

"Siti Zaharah agreed that her decision would not strengthen the party but would instead divide it and create discontent."

To a query on whether the Wanita head had consulted him before announcing the changes, Dr Mahathir said: "Perhaps she forgot ... but she did not inform me."

He advised Siti Zaharah to hold consultations before making such decisions in future.

Asked whether the withdrawal would confuse members, Dr Mahathir said it would not as it would be explained to the affected appointees.

To another question, he said that no changes should be made to the party's line-up until the general election.

In her announced changes, Siti Zaharah had appointed Senator Che Jam Harun as the movement's Penang chief in place of Sharifah Aminah Syed Mohamed while Mariany Mohamed Yit was made the Federal Territory chief replacing Azizah Abdul Samad.

Rokiah Bee Hassan was named the movement's Penang deputy chief to succeed Che Jam while Surinam Sadikun was appointed the Sabah deputy chief in place of Datuk Dayang Mahani Tun Pengiran Ahmad Rafaie.

Rokiah Bee, Surinam and Hamiah Khatib Awang of Pahang had also been made new exco members.

Noridah Ibrahim replaced Azizah Abdul Samad as the assistant treasurer while Senator Kamilia Ibrahim took over from Datin Paduka Fatimah Suhaimi as the movement's information chief.

There were also changes involving new heads for nine of the movement's bureaus. They are Noridah (finance), Kamilia (information), Mesrah Selamat (education), Raja Ropiah Raja Abdullah (housing and urban development), Datuk Maznah Hamid (economy), Khamsiyah Yeop (women's workforce), Datuk Sabariah Ahmad (agriculture), Latifah Omar (industry) and Rokiah Bee (health).

The council tonight approved the formation of 48 new branches - Selangor (23), Kelantan (14), Johor (seven), Penang (two) and Negri Sembilan (two). It also endorsed the setting-up of an Umno club in Western Australia.

Dr Mahathir said efforts to combat lies and slander especially by Pas would be continued.

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