

16/05/2000

Siti Zaharah: Rafidah has the right to make any decision

BANGI, Mon. - Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz has the right to make any decision seen as right for the movement, former chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said.

She said she had no right to dispute the decisions made by Rafidah including dropping nine of the State Wanita heads at the Wanita Umno exco meeting yesterday.

"I have no right to comment because I am no longer the Wanita head. Anything on the movement, you have to ask the new head," she told reporters after attending the opening of the 10th Paralympic Games today.

Asked whether the revamp by Rafidah was something fair and normal in the movement, Siti Zaharah said it was something thought necessary by Rafidah as the movement's head.

"She has her views. And I have my own," said Siti Zaharah, who is National Unity and Social Development Minister.

Pressed further, she said: "I will answer it if I am the Wanita head."

However, she said, whatever the outcome of the election, it would not dampen her spirits to work for Umno's progress.

"I am forever committed to the party," she said.

Meanwhile, Rafidah's move is seen by some as causing disunity among the members.

Former Pahang Wanita Umno information chief, Hamiah Khatib Awang, said if Rafidah was sincere in re-uniting the movement, she should take steps to establish a close and cordial relationship with those aligned to the former chief.

"Rafidah has said that there are no camps in the movement and all should work together to ensure unity.

"But this move of immediately replacing the State Wanita chiefs can only lead to further problems and members will continue to have ill-feelings towards each other," Hamiah said.

Rafidah, who headed the movement from 1984 to 1996 before losing to Siti Zaharah in the 1996 party elections, recaptured her position in the Wanita election last Wednesday. She obtained 341 votes while Siti Zaharah received 329.

Hamiah said a better solution would have been for Rafidah to form a line-up which consisted of both Rafidah's and Siti Zaharah's supporters.

A former State Wanita deputy chief said Rafidah should have discussed the line-up with the State liaison committee heads before making her decision.

"This had always been the practice in the past and I don't see why it has to be changed as the State party heads have a right to suggest who their Wanita leaders should be."

She claimed that some of the appointed Wanita State chiefs did not have the support of the divisional heads. "If this is the situation, how can one expect them to work together?"

However, a State Wanita chief, seen as aligned to Rafidah, said it was unfair for anyone to claim that Rafidah had axed all of Siti Zaharah's supporters.

She cited some aligned to Zaharah, but were included in the new line-up - Mariani Mohd Yit (Federal Territory Wanita secretary), Ramlah Abas (Malacca deputy head) and Sharifah Azizah Datuk Zain (Johor deputy head).

"This shows there is a fair balance and not only those who are Rafidah's

supporters are given posts at the State level," she added.

Meanwhile, it is learnt that Rafidah had a 45-minute meeting with Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his office in Putrajaya today.

However, no details were available on what transpired during the meeting.

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