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Siti Zaharah refutes claims over RM1.3m debt

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SEPANG, Wed. - Former Wanita Umno head Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman today refuted claims by her successor Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz that the movement owed RM1.3 million to Putrade Property Management Sdn Bhd (Putrade).

She also denied that the movement owed the Malaysian Agriculture Research Institute RM14,000 for a course conducted two years ago.

"I regret the statements as I have referred the matter to Putrade, which manages the Putra World Trade Centre and found that they have never made any statement on the issue.

"I have handed over the account and a cheque for RM92,000 to party treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin today. We were merely following procedures and I hope he will hand it over to the new exco."

She was speaking to reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport before leaving for a week's holiday to the United States and to visit her children studying there.

Rafidah had made the allegations yesterday after a 45-minute meeting with Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Rafidah had briefed Dr Mahathir on the movement's financial status and the new line-up of State Wanita heads and deputies she announced on Sunday.

Rafidah had defeated Siti Zaharah for the top post by a 12-vote majority in the Umno Wanita election last week. Rafidah was the movement's head from 1984 before losing to Siti Zaharah in 1996.

On the alleged RM14,000 debt, Siti Zaharah said she had issued a cheque to the movement's treasurer Azizah Samad on May 9, asking Azizah to settle the debt.

"The debt has been resolved. There was a delay because the amount allocated to the movement by the party secretariat was given late to us.

"In fact, we need not pay as the organising chairman (of the course) Raja Ropeaah Raja Abdullah was given the responsibility to look for sponsors to fund the function. She never showed me the account."

Siti Zaharah said the movement's new exco members should not be highlighting the problems faced by Wanita Umno to the Press as it was an internal matter.

"When I took over in 1996, I never highlighted any problem to the Press. What they are doing now looks as if they have hidden motives."

She said when she won three years ago, she was given a personal cheque for RM2,000 by the former secretary Senator Habsah Osman with a message saying "all the best".

"After we made noise about the missing account, we were given RM1 million out of the total RM1.8 million from the account. I do not know what happened to the balance of RM800,000.

"I have raised this matter on several occasions to the party treasurer and the supreme council but no action has been taken.

"I urge those making the claim against me to furnish proof to back the allegations on the RM1.3 million, said to be missing from the movement's account," she said.

She said if at all there was any debt, it was perhaps those left by Rafidah when she was heading the movement from 1984 to 1996.

Rafidah, when met later said she only knew about the debt to Putrade from its owner Tan Sri Rashid Hussain.

"I was shocked when informed by Rashid. It is better if you were to ask him directly," she said.

Rafidah said this after leading a delegation comprising Wanita exco members, State Wanita heads and their deputies who paid a courtesy call on Dr Mahathir at his office in Putrajaya today.

On the RM14,000 debt owed to Mardi, Rafidah said she got the information from Raja Ropeaah who claimed that the money had yet to be settled.

"I was only responding to what the media asked me about my discussion with Dr Mahathir."

Asked on the meeting with Dr Mahathir today, Rafidah said they had a very open discussion on matters relating to the party and the country.

"He had advised us to close ranks and put the party's and country's agenda first. We did not talk about her (Siti Zaharah) at all."

(END)