

Rafidah

STAR 21 JUL 2005

under

fire

Wanita and Puteri delegates stay away from AP issue

Umno delegates rap Iron Lady over AP issue

KUALA LUMPUR: The pressure on Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz was unrelenting.

Umno Youth delegates sharply criticised Rafidah over her handling of the AP (Approved Permit) issue.

The Iron Lady of Malaysian politics remained defiant, strongly defending her role and maintaining that she had been frank about her explanation to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad about the issue and had no reason to apologise to the former prime minister.

In contrast to the fury of the Youth delegates, speakers at the Wanita assembly, in an adjoining hall, avoided the AP issue altogether.

There was no mention of either the AP controversy or the Rafidah-Mahathir issue, leading some Wanita delegates to

● TURN TO PAGE 6

● FROM PAGE 1 STAR 21 JUL 2005 claim that the speeches prepared by the speakers were vetted by the Wanita leadership the night before.

The Puteri debate also side-stepped the matter for reasons of their own, but its chief Noraini Ahmad said there was no instruction to avoid the issue.

However, some of the wing's leaders, speaking to reporters, said they want the Rafidah-Mahathir dispute over the AP issue to be settled amicably; and some thought the Wanita chief should apologise to the former premier.

At a press conference at the end of the women's assembly, Rafidah said those who had asked her to apologise to Dr Mahathir, did not understand the matter.

"They did not read the newspapers. Even the Prime Minister had said that the matter has been resolved," she said.

On why she excluded the AP issue from her keynote address, Rafidah said it was a non-issue.

She said she did not have to raise the matter because there were other important issues for her to talk about.

"The Ninth Malaysia Plan and the role of women are more important. So, no need to include the AP issue in my speech.

"My earlier explanation was very clear, so the question does not arise," she said, in apparent reference to her lengthy defence of the AP distribu-

tion on Tuesday, which saw her breaking down in tears.

On how she felt about the accusations against her, Rafidah said it did not hurt her.

"*Tak jadi kudis pun* (there was not even a scab). But I hope those who spread gossip will stop it because it has created disharmony in the party.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said the delegates who spoke on the issue did not represent the stand of the movement.

"A lot of things were said today. We will look into it. There is no reason for us to make any stand right now," he told reporters after closing the Youth assembly.

Hishammuddin said the wing was concerned about the position of the Malays and the policies affecting them.

Saying that the Youth wing wanted to ensure a fair distribution of wealth, Hishammuddin added: "If the AP policy affects us, then we will make a stand."

Puteri Umno assistant secretary Bibi Sharliza Mohd Khalid said if Rafidah was in the wrong she should make a public apology to Dr Mahathir to put an end to any suspicion and rumours that may have arisen.

"What we want is a clear explanation from Rafidah, although we know she did not intend to hurt his feelings," said Bibi Sharliza, who is the Paroi state assemblyman.