

Show of force for Shahrizat at Wanita meet

MalaysiaKini.com

March 23, 2012

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Thousands of grassroots Umno Wanita members have descended on Kuala Lumpur for the meeting called to explain the planned resignation of their chief, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil as Women, Family and Community Development Minister over her family's involvement in the National Feedlot Corporation scandal.

NONESeveral groups were not shy of their intent to use the meeting to bolster their chief, enthusiastically chanting "Long live Shahrizat" and "We love Shahrizat".

They also unfurled banners and lifting up placards reading: "We fully support Shahrizat's leadership" and "Shahrizat, continue your struggle, we will continue to support you" as a beaming Shahrizat watched on.

Today's meeting comes a day after Umno Wanita deputy chief Kamilia Ibrahim said that Shahrizat's resignation from the Cabinet was insufficient, insisting that she must also relinquish her party post.

NONEHowever, those within Umno Wanita who share that sentiment were conspicuous by their silence at today's meet.

Shahrizat and Kamilia were both huddled into a room as soon as Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak arrived at 3.30pm for the meeting that lasted about ten minutes.

The trio later marched up the red carpet to the hall where some 7,000 members had converged to listen to Najib's explanation of the situation.

Along the way, Kamilia wore an expressionless face as supporters lined beside the walkway and chanted, "We love Shahrizat".

The closed-door event today appeared to be an effort by the premier to forestall any split within the Wanita wing ahead of an anticipated early general election.

Addressing the press after the meeting, Najib, who is Umno president, led wing members in a pledge of loyalty to the party's leadership.

The pledge is to support Umno deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin's and my leadership to ensure victory in the next general election, and support for Shahrizat as Umno Wanita chief, said Najib.

The general sentiments among grassroot members at today's meet appeared to be largely favourable towards Shahrizat, with her critics being in the minority.

Bandar Tun Razak Wanita Umno member Ade Mohammad brushed aside the NFC scandal, claiming that it is unrelated to Shahrizat's political standing.

"If my children has done wrong am I supposed to go to prison for them?" she asked.

The NFC, managed by Shahrizat's husband and three children, is accused of mismanaging part of a RM250 million government soft loan intended for the country's beef valley on luxury property and holiday trips.

Meanwhile, Federal Territories Umno Wanita member Norazlin Abu Kassim said regardless of Shahrizat's situation, she would always support the Wanita chief.

"We always love Shahrizat, in the long time that we've been under her leadership, we have never had any problems standing behind her."

This, she said, was reflected during the closed-door meeting where members had enthusiastically cheered on Shahrizat every time her name was mentioned.

"But no one booed Kamilia, we don't do such things. If we are unhappy, we will target the opposition because it is the opposition that created this issue," she said.

'Effort to prevent sabotage'

However, Norazlin conceded that there were concerns that Kamilia's faction, though in the minority, may sabotage Shahrizat during the general election.

"That if why we are having this meeting today and we will continue to explain to the rakyat that Shahrizat's scandal should not be related to politics," she said.

Meanwhile, Hanum Hussin, a member from Seri Setia Umno wanita division, said she supported calls for Shahrizat to resign but will respect the premier's call to close ranks.

"Frankly speaking, I support what Kamilia said. The reason I came here today is to listen to Kamilia's response.

"But Najib's message is very clear... the election will come at any time, the women are very sensitive about this and doesn't want this to hamper the general election," he said.

However, Hanum voiced her disapproval at the wing's exco members who had during the closed-door meeting called on Najib to extend Shahrizat's position as a cabinet minister.

Hanum added that she is upset over the NFC scandal and that Shahrizat must not only win the support of the 1.3 million wing members but from all Malaysians.

"My personal opinion is that she should have quit as both minister and Umno Wanita chief, but Najib says he does not want any split," she said.

