

**Rafidah sets retirement deadline**  
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**S Pathmawathy**

Wanita Umno chief Rafidah Aziz today announced that she would step down from the movement in the middle of next year.

wanita umno pak lah meet rafidah shahrizat event 040808She said that her deputy Shahrizat Abdul Jalil will then take over the top post and urged her members to give the latter their full support.

Rafidah said this in her speech in a special Wanita Umno meeting officiated by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the Putra World Trade Centre this morning

She also urged the women delegates to allow herself and Shahrizat to continue leading the wing by not nominating any other candidates for the top two posts in this year's party polls.

"As I see it there are two choices; the first would be for me to not contest and therefore, the positions (of Wanita chief and deputy chief) are open to nominations... which in turn would lead to a virulent struggle for the positions.

"(And) every time there is a contest we see people badmouthing others and it destabilises the party's solidarity," she expressed.

wanita umno pak lah meet rafidah shahrizat event 040808 02"My second choice will need the Wanita's unanimous support. If the divisions provide their support for the current leaders, there will be no contest for the positions and by God's grace I'll resign latest by June 2009," she said.

"But if there is a contest, I will not defend my post," said Rafidah, who is in her 20th year as Wanita Umno chief.

Rafidah also said that she had thought of her succession plan two weeks ago while resting after undergoing a knee surgery and had expressed her intention at a previous exco meeting.

In 1996, Rafidah was ousted for a term as the wing's chief when Siti Zaharah Suleiman won in a bitter fight.

Rafidah, a former trade minister, was dropped from the cabinet by Abdullah after the March general election. She however remains the Kuala Kangsar member of parliament.

She also added that the succession formula was intended to handover a unified party to a new leadership.

"I was given a broken wing and it took years to mend their relationships. My wish is for her to take over a party which understands unity," said Rafidah.

**Shahrizat: I will abide to her request**

Meanwhile Shahrizat said that she was a party traditionalist and would abide by Rafidah's

advice on the matter.

batu talam nominations 170107 shahrizat "I have been a party member for 28 years and will always abide by the party's traditions," she said.

Shahrizat said the party's unity and solidarity must be prioritised no matter what happens.

"The wing chief has expressed her wishes and the party president (Abdullah) also agreed to it," said Shahrizat

She was also confident that Wanita exco members would support the call by Rafidah for a smooth succession plan in the wing although the decision was yet to be discussed with the division leaders.

When asked about the ramification of the decision, she expressed that the wing will deal with it when the matter arises.

### **PM: I was shocked**

Abdullah, who was not aware of the Wanita chief's decision, expressed that he was also taken by surprise.

"I was shocked myself," he said during a press conference after officiating the wing's meeting which was attended by more than 800 members.

wanita umno pak lah meet rafidah shahrizat event 040808 06 "We have to pick from many choices and make the right choice. Most importantly all the Wanita members have to be in agreement and they work together," said Abdullah.

"We are facing many challenges of late and the Wanita wing is an important component, therefore their support is important to us (Umno).

"I'm glad the decision taken has been agreed by all parties (Rafidah and Shahrizat)," said the prime minister.