

Rafidah 'worries' about Wanita Umno
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 28 — Wanita Umno needs to get its act together and work towards solidifying Barisan Nasional support for the general election, says former chief Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz.

Members of the Umno wing could not afford to wait until Parliament was dissolved before mobilising to meet voters and explaining "issues". It must be done now.

"I also worry... from the grassroots to the top, they (Wanita Umno leaders) have to go down and explain," she said last night.

The former Minister of International Trade and Industry said Wanita could not afford "last-minute" work. Issues including controversy over the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) needed to be explained well.

Asked if Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil should resign, Rafidah (picture) said Shahrizat should decide whether she saw herself as a "burden" to the party.

"It is up to her to think... withdrawing from the party is not a new thing, it has happened in the past," said the Kuala Kangsar MP.

She said she had been heavily criticised over her calls for Shahrizat to resign, but said she remained firm about what she said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has insisted there was no reason for Shahrizat to cease being Wanita Umno chief as there is no proof or charge of wrongdoing in the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scandal.

Shahrizat announced on March 11 that she would step down as women, family and community development minister when her term as senator ended on April 8, but said she would continue to lead the 1.3 million-strong Wanita.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) last month questioned Shahrizat over allegations she and her family abused a RM250 million federal loan meant for the national cattle farming scheme.

Her husband, Datuk Seri Mohamad Salleh Ismail, who owns the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) with their three children, pleaded not guilty on March 12 to criminal breach of trust and offences under the Companies Act in relation to RM49 million in public funds.

Najib also said he had met Shahrizat and Wanita Umno vice chief Datuk Kamilia Ibrahim and the of them had agreed to cooperate despite Kamilia having called for Shahrizat to relinquish leadership of the wing.

The remarks of Najib, who is Umno president, left open the possibility of Shahrizat contesting the next general election, or making a comeback in the future to revive her political career, which had appeared to have been buried after the scandal.

Najib also shrugged off suggestions that Shahrizat's continued leadership of Wanita Umno would hurt Barisan Nasional's preparations for the election.

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