

'Cattlegate': For BN, business as usual
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Hey diddle diddle,
The MP on the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon
Khairy laughed to see such sport,
And Noh cow-ed like a buffoon

'Cattlegate' has exposed the Women Family and Community Development Minister, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's ill-advised foray into the cattle business.

Shahrizat and her family are alleged to have misappropriated the taxpayers' money; with RM250 million for the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC), an RM800,000 overseas junket and a further RM10 million to purchase a luxury condominium in Bangsar.

Shahrizat's husband operates the NFC and her three children, Izran, 27, Izmir, 31, and Izzana, 25 are chief executive and executive directors.

Malaysians who believe that either she or Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, would accept responsibility and resign over this sordid affair, can moo till the cows come home. At least President Nixon was more honourable in Watergate.

Before leaving for Saudi Arabia, Najib refuted allegations that the NFC had misused public funds. On his return, the PM swapped his desert whites for more casual beach gear as he headed for Hawaii to attend the annual Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit.

The opposition accuses Najib of spending too much time abroad and neglecting business at home. With such criticism, is it any wonder that he prefers to be overseas? His next stop is Bali for the East Asia Conference.

The onerous task of calming public outrage was handed to Najib's deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin (left).

Perhaps Najib thought that this would distract Muhyiddin from plotting to oust him in GE-13.

Muhyiddin was the Agriculture Minister when the NFC project was first approved and he found "nothing unusual" about the controversial project.

He is right. He confirmed our long-held suspicions that BN politicians think there is "nothing unusual" when they and their cronies misuse public funds for their own ends.

'NFC a success'

But BN ministers also excel in passing the buck. Muhyiddin deflected further criticism by redirecting questions to the current Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister, Noh Omar.

The hapless agriculture minister, cowed by the burden of having to massage the truth, declared in

Parliament that the NFC project was a success and had achieved its target of producing 8,000 head of cattle by 2010. Perhaps he was suffering from foot and mouth disease.

If Ministers actually read any of the reports in their in-tray or paid attention in Parliament, they might be more knowledgeable.

The Auditor-General's Report, released the previous week, criticised the NFC project for being "in a mess" and for failing in its objective.

Land grabs are Umno/BN's speciality. So, if the Menteri Besar of Negri Sembilan had been forced to recover 3,000 acres of the 5,000 acres allocated for the NFC, then this project must have been a total disaster.

The 'udder' failure of Najib's administration to instill public confidence is possibly because it has not 'herd' about responsibility or accountability.

With our long list of political scandals, the MACC should have had ample experience ruminating over the ease with which BN politicians treat the treasury as their personal cash cow. Not so. MACC is still chewing the cud.

Perhaps, MACC staff are like tired cows who are all milked out.

Mysterious cases of people flying out of buildings have gone over their heads, just like the nursery rhyme in which the cow jumped over the moon.

Shahrizat's NFC debacle is not the first, nor last, misuse of the public purse. The taxpayer is owed billions but Shahrizat's case is probably the tip of the iceberg and her amounts, mere cattle-fodder.

Most of us would balk at stealing, but BN ministers and their cronies act like the other farm animal, with its nose constantly in the trough.

Stampede of allegations

With the stampede of allegations coming from the opposition, Shahrizat tried to distract the public by turning on Ampang MP Zuraida Kamaruddin: "I see it as a political agenda, an attempt by the Opposition to weaken the spirit of Wanita Umno. We are not that easy to be destroyed (sic) nor are we that soft".

For BN, when all else fails, use sex or sexist remarks.

BN is like a family-run business and outsiders are not allowed. Shahrizat may recall that she lost her seat in the 2008 elections when she was trounced by political newcomer, the 27-year-old Nurul Izzah Anwar (right).

The PM at the time, Badawi, appointed Shahrizat as special adviser. Najib later reinstated her as minister, using a loophole, by making her a senator the day before. In other words, Shahrizat's ministerialship was via the back door.

There seems to be a lot of "back-door-action" in Umno.

Last week, Idris Jala, yet another unelected minister, announced that Malaysia would achieve high-income status by 2020. He said: "Malaysia is doing everything it can to transform itself into a high-income nation. With the programmes and policy measures (Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), I am sure we will not go bankrupt."

Only last year, Jala warned us that we would go bankrupt if we did not curb our spending.

He may be beefing up our confidence but why make himself a laughing stock? Is he suffering from mad-cow disease?

Malaysia would not go through a recession because of the financial turmoil in Europe, he said: ".....our government will not allow that to happen.....We should borrow money provided the money is spent as investment rather than as operating expenditure".

Shahrizat took his advice.

She bought a RM10 million condominium for her family because Jala had said: ".... make sure our borrowing is in proportion to investment".

Herd mentality

The herd mentality is remarkable in the BN Cabinet. They have been relatively and collectively silent about this fiasco.

Only Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin has been strangely vocal, acting as Shahrizat's unofficial spokesman. But he appeared to be like a bull in a china shop.

He charged that the NFC's account was strictly monitored by a technical committee and instead of the money "lying idle", had the right to "invest" the funds in a condominium. He blamed the government for various delays, for failing to build a slaughterhouse and for allocating insufficient funds to operate the satellite farms.

He said, "When these delays happened, the NFC management was faced with an important decision.

"Were they to let the funds given to the National Livestock and Meat Corporation (NLMC is NFC's subsidiary) just sit in a current account which does not give big dividends while waiting for the satellite farms and the abattoirs?

"Or should they invest the money to get returns while waiting for the delay to be resolved?"

Khairy's explanation is as illogical as Noh's statement which said that the government was powerless to act: "If the money has been paid to NFC..... the government cannot control what NFC does with it, including purchasing the said condominium, because it is then considered the company's money."

It is ironic that Khairy (right) refuted Pakatan's allegations in his blog entry titled, "PKR's load of bull". Khairy subconsciously failed to note the simile in his statements.

A few days ago, former PM Mahathir Mohamad said that people should adopt the Japanese work ethos, and feel ashamed if they were unable to carry out their job properly.

He said: "This sense of shame is so strong that they (Japanese) cannot accept failure and they are ashamed of it".

BN and their cronies do not know the meaning of shame. If they did, they would do the honourable thing, just like the Japanese. Then, Putrajaya would be awash with blood and guts, just like an abattoir.

Khairy acts like he has a vested interest in Shahrizat's NFC project or at least her condominium. Shahrizat is nonplussed and protective of her family members, whom she felt had been wrongly accused.

She didn't mince her words when she said, "I don't think they deserve it. They work very hard".

The rakyat are bewildered. The people at the centre of these allegations, namely Shahrizat's spouse and offspring, have been strangely silent about the whole fiasco. Cow-ed into silence perhaps?

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