

NFC puts Najib's transformations in poor light
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COMMENT By BN standards, the National Feedlot Corporation project scandal is no big deal, as it involves no more than RM300 million of public funds.

But the intensive debate over it has allowed us to gauge the country's current state of governance, and more importantly, whether there has been a paradigm shift in the BN leadership under the various transformation programmes brought in by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (left).

The current scandal is typical of BN misadventures with public funds; a large sum is given to an incompetent crony who squanders the money without bringing the project to fruition.

And the response by BN leaders, from the prime minister down, has been nothing but a series of cover-ups and excuses.

There has been no attempt to face the problem squarely and come up with effective remedial measures.

The culture of transparency and accountability seems to be alien to these people, despite hundreds of millions of taxpayers' ringgit being dumped to trumpet Najib's many 'transformations' for the country.

The National Feedlot Corporation Sdn Bhd (NFC) was given the task to "transform the Malaysian cattle and beef industry into a world-class halal beef producer", according to news agency Bernama, reporting on the signing ceremony of the RM250 million soft loan on Dec 6, 2007.

Target production was 60,000 heads of cattle for Phase 1 from the feedlot in Gemas. Operation was scheduled to start in February 2008.

NFC in a mess

Four years on, the auditor-general in his 2010 report stated that the NFC project was in a mess. The total number of cows slaughtered was only 5,742 up to November last year.

Even by the scaled-down target of 8,000 cows per year, the project is a flop.

Compounding this unpalatable report is the discovery of money being misused, such as RM10 million to buy a luxurious condominium and over RM800,000 for overseas travelling and entertainment in 2009, despite the company running at a loss of RM7 million in 2008 and RM11 million in 2009.

It looks like NFC will meet the same fate as so many other BN forerunners such as the PKFZ, Perwaja, etc - besides losing hefty public funds, the dream of transforming this or that is gone.

And who owns NFC? The family of Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Women, Welfare and Community Development Minister, and head of Wanita Umno.

Her husband, Mohamad Salleh Ismail, is the chairperson, and of her children, one is CEO and two are executive directors of the company.

Expertise and experience in the business of cattle production and beef supply of the Shahrizat family is nil.

There are more than 300 feedlot farms in this country, and many established businesses in the beef supply industry.

With our people's accumulation of expertise in this area, shouldn't we have entrusted the important mission of boosting domestic beef production to entrepreneurs who are better qualified than the Shahrizat family?

Top guns to the defence

Added to the comedy is the scrambling to defend NFC and Shahrizat by personages no less than the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the agriculture and agro-based industries minister, the Umno Youth leader, and now the latest, former prime minister Abdullah Badawi.

The PM said in Parliament on Nov 11 that there was no wrong-doing, and that production will soon increase to "12,000 cattle from 6,000 previously".

The DPM, who started the project when he was then the minister involved, said in a press conference on Oct 29 that he saw nothing "unusual or anything wrong" with the project and passed the buck to current Agriculture Minister Noh Omar, to answer further questions.

Noh (left) denied any impropriety in the award of this project and called the project a "success", giving various reasons for the meagre production.

Umno Youth leader Khairy Jamaluddin, who holds no government post, has strangely emerged as the most vocal defender. However, his lengthy discourse seems to excel more in offensive language than in helpful facts.

And even former premier Abdullah Badawi has come to Shahrizat's rescue. He said on Nov 15 that there was no need for her to resign as she is not the CEO and hence not involved. This was in answer to repeated calls for Shahrizat to resign.

Strangely, no one seems to have called for the two ministers concerned to be brought to book - the previous agriculture minister (now DPM) Muhyiddin Yassin for having dubiously awarded the project to an incompetent recipient and the current minister Noh Omar for failing to properly oversee the execution of the project.

As for our corruption watchdog MACC, it had remained eerily silent since the scandal broke out almost three weeks ago until the scandal got overheated and it passed the buck to the police two days ago, saying that this is a police case, not a MACC case.

Will police do anything? Your guess is as good as mine.

There you are, Najib's transformations for you.

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