

Muhyiddin must explain Cowgate 'mess' to PAC

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DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang has demanded that Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who was the agriculture minister when the controversial National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) project was conceived in 2006, answer for the 'mess' that it has become.

And since Muhyiddin is more responsible for the embattled cattle production project than incumbent Agriculture Minister Noh Omar, he should testify before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) when it investigates the issue on Wednesday.

"Who else, apart from Muhyiddin, should bear the full and final responsibility for the NFC 'mess'?" asked the MP for Ipoh Timor in a statement issued yesterday.

How could a project on cattle production purported to boost the nation's beef self-sufficiency go so wrong, that money can be diverted to buy two luxury condominium units in Bangsar, amongst other dubious transactions as exposed by PKR secretary-general and MP Saifuddin Nasution and PKR chief of strategy Rafizi Ramli, he asked.

Lim wants said Muhyiddin must not only explain his role in the Cowgate scandal, but clarify the extent of the cabinet's involvement in the project.

He also chastised Muhyiddin for keeping quiet as the controversy grew, as others from his party, Umno, and the BN, defended the project.

"Only Muhyiddin himself can explain his ministerial lapses that have resulted in the RM300 million NFC project becoming such a mess and scandal today!" he said.

PAC chair should resolve conflicts of interest

Lim also asked whether PAC chairperson Azmi Khalid should not excuse himself from the committee's investigations to avoid conflict of interest, since Azmi was a cabinet member when the project was approved.

"Can Azmi categorically declare that he was not involved, in any way, in any cabinet approval or discussion of the NFC project before he was dropped from the cabinet after the March 2008 general election?"

The scandal erupted when the Auditor-General's Report 2010 highlighted the NFC project as "a mess" and found it to be 41.1 percent short of its 2010 target for 3,289 heads of cattle slaughtered.

PKR then raised a number of issues on the NFC, including the use of public funds to purchase a luxury condominium and to pay for an overseas trip for the family members of the project operators. It also said the the NFC only benefited Umno leaders.

The NFC has refuted the allegations, saying it had met production targets, and the condominium units were an investment to hedge unutilised funds.

Its chief executive Mohamed Salleh Ismail, who is also husband of Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, said NFC had been sabotaged by two former staff members who leaked financial information.

Yesterday, PKR alleged that the corporation also funded the umrah expenses for Mohamed Salleh and his son, as well as two other companies he has interests in.

The police are reportedly investigating whether there was any criminal breach of trust in purchasing the condominium units.

Muhyiddin last Friday flatly dismissed the opposition attacks, insisting that the government was "well aware of the real status" of the issue.

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