

Shahrizat is Najib's millstone
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Mariam Mokhtar

There was one serious flaw in the success story of Malaya: The emergent Malaysia bred generations of Malay politicians who, when caught with their hands in the public kitty, will do anything to hang on to power.

They continue nonchalantly because they are confident their peers will play along with the charade.

They delight in "proving their innocence" by swearing on the Quran. Some think that by seeking absolution from God, by going on umrahs, they are able to convince the god-fearing public, that the pilgrimage is a testament of their innocence.

NONEThe National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) scandal hangs like a millstone around the neck of the Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil (right).

Acting like a wounded animal, she has chosen to belittle Islam, and cast doubt on the intelligence of Malaysians. She has even striven to involve Wanita Umno.

On her return from the umrah, Shahrizat said: "Why have I went [sic] to Mecca three times in two-and-a-half months? Because I'm God-fearing, I ask for guidance from Allah."

Instead of inviting understanding and compassion, Shahrizat only increased our contempt of her. How can Shahrizat spend so much time away from work? What is her ministry's Key Performance Index? How can she waste so much of the taxpayers' money on three trips to Saudi Arabia, in as many months?

Are we to infer that holy visits are a proof of innocence? In times of austerity, how did she stretch her ministerial wage?

Perhaps, the opposition should table a parliamentary motion for all ministers to declare their expenses, and NOT just their assets.

The fault is not her's entirely. The whole award system lacks transparency. The MACC and the police drag their feet on investigations. The prime minister only pretends to act like one.

The RM250 million of misappropriated public funds swirl around the NFC, whose chairman Mohamed Salleh Ismail is Shahrizat's husband.

Money not disbursed to satellite ranchers

Their children are also implicated and it is alleged that they have business dealings with other ministerial children.

The Auditor-General, Ambrin Buang, has stated that the audit was not on the NFC, as a whole, and that it established that the NFC had failed to meet its target.

The audit was merely to ascertain why money was not disbursed to the satellite ranchers despite being channelled to the ministry/NFC.

NONEIn an interview with Rafizi Ramli (left), the PKR strategic director who highlighted the NFC scandal, PKR used the audit report to demand accountability in government funding: "We carried out our own investigation and followed leads provided by whistleblowers.

“The resultant exposés are clear indictments that public funds had been channelled outside NFC to benefit the family of a federal minister.”

Rafizi alleged that various companies which had been set up and received NFC funding, were owned wholly by Shahrizat’s family. Capital assets of the NFC had no relevance to the cattle industry and targets agreed with the government were not achieved.

Simple questions were asked: “When these businesses don’t seem to be making money, who is going to repay the loans?”

“Why was this company, owned by a minister’s family, chosen as an integrator for this project when they had no experience in the cattle industry and they openly admitted this?”

“Why did they transfer money to entities controlled by them and then go on shopping sprees?”

“This is a government-funded project, why did they spend exorbitantly when the targets were not met?”

Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin defended the NFC project and rejected opposition demands for a royal commission of inquiry (RCI) to investigate the NFC, because he claimed that current investigations were sufficient.

Rafizi rubbished his comments and said: “The NFC scandal has come to a stage where normal investigation will not be able to unravel the extent of abuse and political interference. That is why Pakatan has stepped up calls for an RCI.

“We started with revelations of financial misappropriation of public funds, but gradually we discovered that the extent was worse than anticipated.

“Lately, there had been clear attempts to cover up the scandal. This suggests that public officials were coerced into making statements favourable to the NFC.”

‘Shady deals’ conducted behind the scene

Asked if the AG had made a U-turn, Rafizi said: “It was unprecedented for the Auditor-General to bow down to political pressure.

“We have also established the modus operandi used to transfer funds to companies or business entities owned by the minister’s family.”

Rafizi alleged that many shady deals were being conducted behind the scenes, despite Najib’s claims that NFC’s assets had been frozen.

“There is a frantic move to restructure the groups and transfer assets so as to cover their tracks, in preparation for a media blitz by NFC, later this month.

“So this is no longer an issue about cows. It is about the whole weight of government resources and machinery being bent to save a minister, whose family has clearly misappropriated public funds for purposes not agreed by the government.

“A scandal of this scale requires a far reaching investigation that only an RCI has the power to accomplish.”

Supporting calls for investigations into the NFC is DAP’s Lim Kit Siang (right) who has urged patriotic Malaysians “to demand in a loud and clear voice an RCI into the NFC scandal”.

Rafizi agreed: "Public pressure is paramount to this effort. Najib's administration lives in fear of a public backlash, so they monitor activities on the internet and carry out surveys regularly to gauge the public sentiment."

The PKR strategic director discussed tactics to make the government accede to an RCI.

"To those who are bold enough to participate in a rally, please also organise rallies and get people to participate.

"Letters to online media, mainstream newspapers and government websites will help maintain the pressure.

"Better still, if people interact constantly with the prime minister via twitter to pressure him for an RCI on NFC - he would be pressured one way or another to respond. Comments made at PM's blog and online media do make a lot of difference."

Later this month, Rafizi will team up with Ampang MP Zuraida Kamaruddin, on a nationwide campaign.

"We will sell books and meet the public to explain why an RCI is necessary. As this gathers momentum, we need the public to show up at these roadshows. We hope Najib has no option but to agree to an RCI."

Following the opposition's investigations, Rafizi stressed that several questions had been directed at both Najib and the BN.

"So far no answers have been forthcoming."

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