

Charges against NFC boss: An escape route for BN?

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It appears that the charging of NFC chairman Mohamed Salleh Ismail in court is a tactical move to get away from the scorching NFC scandal - the same way BN has got away with the RM12.5 billion PKFZ ghost town scandal and the Former Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo corruption scandal.

This move is known as the "decoy and silence" tactic, which has been BN's time-tested strategy to slip away from a high corruption scandal entrapment.

It is simply to initiate a peripheral charge to divert attention from the real issue and use the court action as shield to fence off further attacks on ground of "subjudice".

This was vividly illustrated in Parliament on Mar 13, a day after Mohamed Salleh was charged, when Speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia absurdly cited the current court case as reason to reject an emergency motion on the NFC project debacle tabled by MP Zuraidah Kamaruddin, despite the latter explaining that her issue was with the ministries which approved the project, and not with Mohamed Salleh's misconduct, which is the subject matter of the current court case.

And on the same day, Agriculture Minister Noh Omar, under whose jurisdiction the NFC project falls, deflected all questions on the scandal on the equally ridiculous suggestion of subjudice; while BN MP Rahman Dahlan falsely claimed that the court is now the best platform to thrash out the issues, adding that the party that should answer questions is the NFC, and not the ministries.

Apparently, BN hopes that with Mohamed Salleh in the dock, the BN government would be left in peace.

A decoy

But what is Mohamed Salleh charged for? He is charged for misusing part of the soft loan meant to spearhead the beef production industry.

And what is the public furious about? They are angry at the alleged high corruption going on at the highest hierarchy of the BN leadership that has led to this fiasco that saw not only huge public funds - RM250 million and a grant of RM13 million - going down the drain but also a key food production scheme thwarted.

So who is the bigger culprit - the guardian of public funds or the recipient of these funds?

The elected leaders who have betrayed public trust to honestly and prudently manage the country's resources or the private project developer who has failed?

Obviously the main focus of investigation should be on the former.
The public wants to know why and how a manifestly incompetent party was awarded the contract.

And since the appointee is the family of a cabinet minister, the public also wants to know whether there are elements of corruption?

In this connection, why weren't the two key decision-makers in this fiasco investigated, namely, then agriculture minister Muhyiddin Yassin and then chairman of the committee for high impact projects, Najib Abdul Razak, who had jointly approved the award?

Will the MACC please answer this question now?

Will the MACC also brief us on the status of its investigation since its start almost four months ago?

The simple answer of "case still under investigation, can't disclose details to avoid jeopardising investigation" won't do, as four months is too long a time to give this lame excuse.

In fact, such an answer has long been recognised as MACC's standard ploy to stonewall public inquisitiveness over a high profile BN scandal.

If MACC insists on giving such an answer, it will be taken as: "sorry, we can't oblige".

Will BN be off the hook again?

As for the current court case, do not expect that anything meaningful will come out of it, judging from similar cases against BN elite in the past.

Mohamed Salleh is accused of improperly transferring funds from NFC (National Feedlot Corporation) to another company (National Meat and Livestock Corporation) where improper purchases of assets unrelated to the project were made.

As both companies are owned by Minister Shahrizat's family, with the exception that the government has a golden share in the former but not the latter company, such improper transfer of funds cannot be considered a serious fraud.

The more serious contention is over the propriety of the asset purchases, which is apparently a violation of the loan agreement. But Salleh is not charged for such violation.

It is not difficult to see that the present drama is a carefully crafted stratagem involving the concerted effort of MACC, police and the attorney general, to extricate BN from a potentially crippling predicament on the eve of an impending election.

Will BN succeed again this time under the nose of a resurgent opposition alliance and an activated civil society?

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