

Shahrizat felt humiliated by 'cow minister' tag

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By Hafiz Yatim

Former minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil described in detail in the High Court in Kuala Lumpur today her humiliation at being called "Cow minister of the year" by parliamentarian and PKR Wanita chief Zuraida Kamaruddin.

No one, even politicians, deserved to be called in such a manner, the former women, family and community development minister told Judicial Commissioner Vazeer Alam Mydin Meera when testifying on the RM100 million defamation suit she filed on Jan 19.

"Surely nobody deserves to be insulted in such a manner. This is beyond acceptable 'political bantering'.

"It is obvious that Zuraida realises the reference to 'lembu' is a derogatory remark and in the colloquial Malay sense suggests stupidity, and this is slanderous and insulting," Shahrizat said.

A minister for 13 years, she described the words uttered as meant to humiliate and tarnish her reputation as a woman and that this went beyond the permissible extent, even in the political arena.

Zuraida made the remark during the PKR delegates conference last year, Shahrizat said in the suit she filed against PKR director of strategy Rafizi Ramli and Zuraida for implicating her in the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) Sdn Bhd fiasco.

Rafizi and Zuraida have filed a counter-claim against the former minister.

The Umno Wanita leader and seasoned politician also said the Internet had resulted in the allegations "to be unstoppable", despite she being cleared by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

'Internet a strange creature... unstoppable'

"The Internet is a strange creature in that once it has built sufficient momentum, it becomes unstoppable. Reading about a politician being allegedly corrupt is sensational and creates interest.

"However, reading any publication subsequently declaring the innocence will often go unnoticed.

"You must understand that if abused, the Internet can be an unchecked and uncontrollable weapon to spread rumours and lies, until such time a euphoria of hate is created among the public," Shahrizat said.

She said these accusations against her became a topic of conversation even in the Internet and on social networks.

Shahrizat said the very nature of social networks, when one posts comments, invite others to comment.

"This is when embellishment takes place. In fact, I was informed the allegations against me spiralled into suggestions and accusations that the National Feedlot Corporation funded holidays for me in Phuket.

"My whole family and I have never ever been to Phuket. This is a ridiculous and blatant vicious lie orchestrated to produce anger and hatred towards me and my family," she said of the allegation raised by Rafizi.

Rafizi at in one of his press conferences, Shahrizat said, claimed that the NFC booked a holiday through travel agency Impian Global Network Services. However, Shahrizat said, as a travel agency, Impian Global arranged tickets for business and pleasure as well.

"Let me explain how mischievous Rafizi is. In his press conference, he identified that payments were made through the travel agent by NFC. He then produced a print-out of their website, which revealed that this travel agent also advertised holiday packages to Phuket, Bandung, etc.

"He then made this insidious and deceptive conclusion that since these packages were advertised, NFC must have bought packages to Phuket, Bandung and other advertised holiday destinations.

"In all honesty, NFC never bought me any holiday packages but instead, merely used the travel agent for its ticketing for business travel," she said.

'Rafizi planted seeds of doubt and suspicion'

Shahrizat said Rafizi planted seeds of doubts and suspicion in his press conference by referring to the website advertisements for holiday packages and concluded that NFC bought holiday packages for her.

The former minister and Umno Wanita chief said hundreds of articles were now circulated on the Internet on the NFC issue, along with widespread postings on Facebook, Twitter and other social networks.

She also touched on her decision to resign from the cabinet when her term as senator expired.

"As a responsible leader, I wanted to do the right thing. I do not want the opposition to use me as the wife of the NFC chairperson to malign or cast aspersions on the government while I hold public office.

"I was being investigated by the MACC, judged by the court of public opinion as a result of the lies orchestrated by the defendants (Rafizi and Zuraida).

"It was not tenable for me to carry out my public duties so I resigned as minister at the end of my term as a senator. However, I am still the Wanita Umno and Wanita BN chief," she said.

Shahrizat is expected to be cross-examined by lawyers for Rafizi and Zuraida on Friday before Justice Vazeer Alam. Also present in court today was her husband and NFC chairperson Mohd Salleh Ismail and their children.

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