

## **Striking A Deal With Shahrizat's Family?**

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What is the response of the Minister for Women, Family and Community Development and Wanita UMNO leader Shahrizat Abdul Jalil to the advice of her Cabinet colleague, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Aziz that her family repay the RM250 million government loan obtained for the scandal-ridden National Feedlot Centre (NFC) project?

Would she be telling the Cabinet meeting tomorrow her response to Nazri's advice who had claimed that this was the best solution to put an end to the ongoing controversy without forcing her resignation as Minister?

Equally important, does the Prime Minister, Najib Razak as well as the other Cabinet Ministers agree with Nazri?

Nazri's shocking suggestion has raised many questions as well as evoked various scenarios.

Firstly, can a deal be struck with anyone facing or likely to face criminal charges for being caught in a sticky political situation?

Retired Kuala Lumpur CID chief, Mat Zain Ibrahim, has accused Nazri of trying to strike a deal with Shahrizat and her family by asking her to repay the RM250 million federal loan for NFC.

He stressed that even if the minister's family repaid the entire amount of the loan, it could not indemnify her family members who would continue to be liable for the offences of financial abuses and misappropriations committed by them.

Or as a commentator on my blog has argued very cogently:

"Nazri is talking about repatriation of ill-gotten gains. Even if it does happen, it will not absolve wrongdoing committed by relevant parties at 1st instance but may mitigate severity of their punishment for that wrong doing....

"However when it comes to holding public office, it is hard to see how that can be maintained at status quo when abuse, if any, has been conceded by the very act of repatriating the fruits of that abuse!

"Surely one cannot set a precedent where a public office holder can abuse his/her office and risk nothing except only returning/repatriating ill gotten gains as a way not only to escape punishment but to hold on to that office/position abused!

"Like that the whole reward-punishment system becomes topsy-turvy and soon the attitude of 'nothing ventured nothing gained' will be prevalent as far as abusing public positions goes when there is no cost but only benefit to venture a wrongdoing!

"Isn't it so if the best is when one gets to keep the ill gotten gains (if not caught) (a real happy ending), and the worst a wrong doer faces when (bad luck) he/she is caught is just having to give up ill gotten gains (without punishment) (a not so unhappy ending)?"

Secondly, is Nazri privy to information that the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency (MACC), the Police and the Attorney-General's Chambers have reached the final conclusion that neither Shahrizat nor her family members had been guilty of any offences under any laws of the land after the investigations into the NFC scandal, that they have not committed any legal wrongs although their conduct may be morally and politicall reprehensible.

If so, this reflects most adversely on the independence, integrity and professionalism of the Attorney-General's Chambers and the two enforcement agencies, MACC and the police.

Otherwise, how could Nazri be so presumptuous as to say:

"She does not have to resign. The main thing is, return the money to the government.

"But after this, it is better to use open tender to avoid such unwanted incidents."

Thirdly, was Nazri just reflecting the thinking of the Najib UMNO leadership - that the whole matter can be "covered up" if Shahrizat repays the RM250 million government loan. If so, isn't this a gross interference with the independence, integrity and professionalism of the Attorney-General's Chambers, the police and the MACC, and a travesty of the rule of law, as it is no less than a very clear signal to the relevant authorities of the "wishes" of the government political leadership of the day.

It is most unfortunate that one collateral damage of the NFC scandal is that the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is likely to be one of the casualties.

NFCorp chief executive officer Wan Shahinur Izmi Salleh has made the shocking public claim that the NFCorp has been given a completely blank cheque to do what it likes with the RM250 million government loan, as "NFC retains the prerogative to invest the funds in the best interests of the company".

Although PAC member and MP for PJ Utara, Tony Pua has said that the PAC had been told by a senior Finance Ministry official at its meeting in November that the NFC loan could not be used for purposes other than what had been specified, that the purpose of each drawdown must be clearly stated and that the ministry had never received an application from NFCorp to purchase property, the PAC has not sighted nor verified the NFC loan agreement and other relevant documentation.

MPs from both Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat have a right to expect the PAC to inform them of the outcome of PAC examination into the NFC loan agreement and other relevant documentation and establish the true facts of the case.

Azmi Khalid would have to explain to Parliament when it reconvenes on March 12 why he had refused to convene a PAC meeting since its last PAC meeting on November 23 to have sight on the NFC loan agreement and other relevant documentation so as to fully discharge its PAC duties.

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