

**REFSA - Crisps Of The Week**  
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**By REFSA**

The cows have finally come home. Or have they? After months of being urged to resign over her link to the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) scandals, Shahrizat is yielding her cabinet post. However, she would remain as Wanita Umno chief.

Before one can declare that the Woman, Family and Community Development minister was cowed by public pressure, no less than the premier and the deputy prime minister have stepped up to trumpet Shahrizat's resignation as a 'sacrifice'. Najib lauded her move as 'appropriate and correct', while Muhyiddin called it 'a magnanimous act'.

Many however, are having a cow over the praises showered on Shahrizat. Former Wanita Umno chief Rafidah Aziz charged that Shahrizat's resignation was not a sacrifice; she merely relinquished her position a little earlier than April 8, when her senatorship would expire. Author of No Bullshit Please, We're Malaysians Kee Thuan Chye Kee agreed, saying Muhyiddin shot himself in the foot when lauding Shahrizat's decision.

While tongues are wagging over the controversial resignation, Parliament seems to be sealing the lips of opposition parties in debating the NFC issue. Dewan Rakyat speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia has rejected the urgent motion filed by PKR's Zuraida Kamaruddin, on grounds that the NFC chairperson Mohamad Salleh Ismail is being charged in court. Zuraida was disappointed, saying that her motion was not about Salleh, but questions the role of the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry and Finance Ministry in the matter.

The Public Accounts Committee, on the other hand, would press on with its own investigations into the NFC despite the court proceedings.

Peeving Party

Najib touted Shahrizat as a martyr 'for the sake of the government and the interest of the party'. Would he then take a leaf out of her book and reveal the truth over the lavish family celebrations that are eating into his government's image?

While Malaysians are asked to tighten their belts, Najib has reportedly spent RM 79,053 on his private birthday bash and RM409,767 on his daughter's engagement party – all within a month.

What takes the cake is that both the banquet event orders (BEO) were allegedly billed under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) account. The documents, revealed by PKR, also detailed the expensive menu for the engagement do which includes exquisite cuisine such as lobster bisque and wagyu beef, while the birthday party's flower arrangement alone costs RM30,000.

While Shangri-La has verified the authenticity of the document for the engagement party, it also clarified that it was Najib himself who settled the bill. PKR-linked NGO Jingga 13 demands the hotel to provide evidence to its claims.

PKR's strategic director Rafizi Ramli also quizzed on how Najib could afford to pay for two extravagant banquets in a month, when the PM's salary per month was reportedly only RM22,800. An outrageous RM800 was spent on each guest at the birthday party; compare this to the government's RM500 handout to the poor.

Another deal bites the dust?

While darkness has permeated public coffers, light appears to be shining on Malaysian's airline industry. Najib has promised to review the share-swap deal between Malaysian Airlines (MAS) and AirAsia, following MAS posting its highest ever losses. MAS Employees Union (MASEU) hopes the review may signal the end of the tie-up.

REFSA welcomes the separation of MAS and AirAsia. We pointed out earlier that the rakyat would be the biggest losers if the previously-fierce competitors merge. Read why we oppose the deal here.

Dreams crumbling

On ground level, the sun seems to be setting on the first-home buyer's dreams to own a place amidst spiralling housing costs. Not a single loan application has been approved under Putrajaya's My First Home scheme for low-income earners. The National Homebuyers Association has called the scheme an 'ill-advised policy', as most of the applicants would clearly not be able to pay off the loan.

Applicants could, however, still look forward to KL's new low-cost housing scheme, which would be funded by an RM1.5 billion loan using the retirement savings of Malaysian workers.

Dissent fails to 'bump off' Bill

Perhaps 'ill-advised' policies could make their way into Putrajaya because some ministries are living in a self-fulfilling bubble.

One example is the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). The Board of Computing Professionals Malaysia (BCPM) Bill which comes under its jurisdiction has been hotly criticised; official feedback shows that 71 percent of the public has rejected the proposed law. The ministry however is sceptical of the finding and has refused to accept the obvious.

Rather than reviewing the BCPM Bill, MOSTI said that the numbers 'may not reflect the overall segment of the ICT (information and communications technology) community', and proposed further engagement with relevant stakeholders to facilitate a 'better comprehension' of the Act.

REFSA would like to point out that the industry probably understood MOSTI's Bill well enough; it is MOSTI which needs to understand the industry.

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