

Najib defends cattle project linked to minister's family
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 1 — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has dismissed allegations of abuse of power in the federal government's RM250 million soft loan to a company owned by Cabinet minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil's husband that operates the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC).

Najib, who is also Finance Minister, said today in a written reply to a parliamentary question that the company — Agrosience Sdn Bhd — had been selected to operate the NFC project to create Malaysia's "Beef Valley" after a tender process involving five other companies.

The Auditor-General's Report released last week had criticised the project, and pointed out that it was now "in a mess".

It said production in 2010 was only 3,289 head of cattle or 41.1 per cent of the target set.

Yesterday, Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Datuk Seri Noh Omar told Parliament the NFC project was a success, insisting that the cattle farming scheme met its target of producing 8,000 head of cattle by 2010.

In a separate response today, Najib (picture) said that as at July 31 RM181.9 million had been channelled to NFC to implement the project.

"The loan was given with the aim of implementing the project to meet the demand for beef in the country and achieve the 38 per cent self-sufficiency goal," he said

Najib added that the NFC was currently producing local beef of high quality and commercial value.

"NFC products are now available at major supermarkets like Jaya Jusco, Giant, Carrefour and Cold Storage, as well as in wet markets, restaurants and retail shops nationwide.

"NFC is in the midst of increasing its feedlot production capacity to 12,000 cattle from 6,000 previously. It will also increase the capacity of its abattoir to 200 cattle daily. All these developments are expected to be completed by early next year."

Earlier today, PKR revealed what it said was proof the NFC had only met under five per cent of its annual production target, refuting Putrajaya's claim that the scheme was a success.

Backing the Auditor-General's assertion that the project had turned into a mess, PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli claimed the NFC's original target was to produce 60,000 head of cattle annually.

Rafizi said it had cost the NFC RM141 million to produce 8,016 head of cattle, which is 22 times more than the ministry's original estimate of RM6.37 million to rear 9,000 cows annually.

He was referring to the policy paper on the project that is still available on the Department

of Veterinary Services (DVS) website.

Yesterday, Noh denied that the project was awarded directly to Agrosience, a company owned by Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat's husband, Datuk Dr Mohamad Salleh Ismail.

The Agriculture Ministry has also released the biodata of NFC's top management, naming Shahrizat's three children — Izran, 27, Izmir, 31, and Izzana, 25 — as chief executive and executive directors respectively.

It further said that Mohamad Salleh, NFC's executive chairman, holds a doctorate in fermentation technology and was head of food science at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia in 1981.

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