

Will Shahrizat be dropped from Cabinet, Guan Eng asks
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 15 — The RM250 million cattle-farm scandal linked to her husband and children may lose minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil her Cabinet post sooner than imagined.

The DAP's Lim Guan Eng suggested today that the women, family and community minister since 2001 may be axed from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Cabinet tonight.

"Tonight's meeting between the prime minister and all the BN chiefs is very interesting. It can only be one of two things: No 1 elections, which I think is unlikely; or No 2 something which people have not talked about, Cabinet reshuffle," the Penang chief minister told reporters in George Town this afternoon.

The Malaysian Insider received an audio recording of the media conference this afternoon.

"Which leads to a very interesting question: Would Shahrizat withdraw? Because of the National Feedlot Centre scandal, where instead of rearing cows in fields, she wants to rear cow in condominiums," Lim said, poking fun at recent allegations against the minister over her family ties.

Despite having no direct links or stake in the scandal-tainted National Feedlot Corporation (NFC), Shahrizat has been tarred with the same brush.

Politicians on both sides of the divide have been clamouring for Shahrizat's resignation following the expose by the Auditor-General in his 2010 report last month.

The DAP secretary-general joined today the ranks of political observers speculating over the reasons behind Najib's last-minute meeting with the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) component party leaders.

Shahrizat, 58, has been heading the women affairs portfolio since 2001 during the Mahathir administration.

The Wanita Umno chief retained the ministerial post despite being ousted in the landmark 2008 general elections by newcomer Nurul Izzah Anwar who won the Lembah Pantai Umno stronghold.

The National Feedlot Centre in Negri Sembilan. — file pic
Allegations of financial impropriety have dogged the company owned by Shahrizat's family after the Auditor-General revealed last month that the NFC had failed to meet production targets for 2010 despite benefiting from a RM134.72 million soft loan from the government.

The Auditor-General's Report also criticised the NFC, pointing out that it was now "in a mess".

Shahrizat is married to NFC executive director Datuk Mohamad Salleh Ismail. Their three children run the cattle business.

But Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar responded on October 31 that the project is a success and had met its targets.

He said a total of RM250 million was earmarked for the NFC project and placed in a special loan account in Maybank that was controlled by the Finance Ministry.

He said RM181 million from that account has already been disbursed to NFC based on its claims.

But Opposition politicians have alleged that RM10 million of the money for the cattle project had instead been used to buy a luxury condominium in Bangsar, an upmarket suburb in the capital city.

The Malaysian Insider understands the NFC started operations in 2008, when Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was prime minister and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin was the agriculture and agro-based minister.

Abdullah stepped down from office in April 2009, paving the way for Najib, who promptly appointed Muhyiddin as his deputy.

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