

Noh Omar denies NFC issue ever brought up in Cabinet
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By Melissa Chi

KLANG, Nov 19 — Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Datuk Seri Noh Omar denied today that the decision to award the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) project was discussed during Cabinet meetings.

"I can confirm that NFC is under the High-Impact Projects Committee and at the time of the loan approval to NFC, that was not under the Cabinet, not (mentioned) in the meetings," Noh (picture) told reporters after the launch of the farmers, livestock breeders and fishermen's day celebration at the Selangor Mardi headquarters here.

PKR yesterday demanded that the Najib administration disclose all Cabinet meeting minutes from 2006 onwards to determine if Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil was directly involved in the decision to award the NFC project to her husband's company.

PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli pointed out that NFC executive chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Salleh Ismail, Shahrizat's husband, had not denied a single allegation and had merely offered explanations for the many discrepancies involved in the federally-funded RM250 million cattle project.

Instead, he said, Mohamad Salleh had made three major admissions when addressing the issue on Thursday — that his company had no experience in the cattle farming industry prior to the project award; that the RM250 million government loan had not been accompanied by a repayment schedule; and that the company had purchased "not one, but two" luxury condominium units for a whopping RM13.8 million in total.

The cattle farming project kicked off in 2008.

"Just like other projects, this was only discussed at the committee level, at the High-Impact Projects Committee," Noh said.

In September 2006, the Cabinet's High Impact Projects Committee was headed by then-Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to expedite approval for high-impact projects by foreign investors.

Najib was reported as saying that the committee would comprise representatives from various ministries, including International Trade and Industry, Finance and the Prime Minister's Department. A secretariat would be set up at the Economic Planning Unit.

On the type of projects to be referred to the committee, Najib said they should exceed RM10 billion ringgit in value.

Noh explained that six companies had made presentations to the committee. Out of the six, two companies were chosen, National Feedlot Corporation Sdn Bhd owned by Agrosience Industries Sdn Bhd and Lambert, Agricultural Trade (M) Sdn Bhd.

"It wasn't a direct negotiation and not a grant. A loan was given," he said.

It was reported, however, that the main operator, Lambert, had withdrawn from the project in 2008 after it failed to obtain support from partner companies for the supply of cattle.

When pressed further regarding the controversial company, Noh said the company should address all questions from now on as he "has already given the explanation regarding the government's responsibility to ensure the project goes on".

"As for the company's operations, that is out of the government's hands, so let the company explain," he said.

According to media reports, Mohamad Salleh had claimed that the cattle-farming project had exceeded its set target, disputing a federal audit describing the scheme as being "in a mess".

He also defended his company's purchase of two units at the luxurious One Menerung condominium in Bangsar, saying it was a sound investment which yielded 12.9 per cent returns in the first year.

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