

Soi Lek: BN, Shahrizat handled NFC scandal poorly
The Malaysian Insider
January 21 , 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21 — The Barisan Nasional (BN) government, particularly embattled minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abd Jalil, handled the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) controversy poorly, causing the public to perceive the project as “real rotten”, says Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek.

The MCA president said Shahrizat was “poorly advised” on the matter after it was highlighted in the Auditor-General’s Report 2010, adding that, as a senior minister, she should have known what to do when faced with resounding calls for her resignation.

“They should have caught the bull by the horns in the early days. First, by having an audit. Having an open book about it,” Dr Chua told The Malaysian Insider in an exclusive interview at the MCA headquarters here.

Performing an audit early on might have dispelled some of the suspicion, said Dr Chua. He noted that the RM250 million federally-funded NFC project “has problems”, which was further exacerbated by the opposition’s “spinning” in the media.

“Because they (the opposition) have the information, they would release it in stages and this would give the impression that it is real rotten.

“And the BN government, in their response, has been very slow. And they have not been very open,” he said.

Despite this, however, Dr Chua disagreed that Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s silence on the issue meant the prime minister was protecting Shahrizat or the rest of his Cabinet.

He pointed out that the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) had initiated investigations, while the government had also announced the appointment of an accounting firm to audit the National Feedlot Corporation’s (NFCorp) finances.

NFCorp is run by Shahrizat’s husband and children.

Dr Chua added that should the audit uncover any irregularities in the NFC, Shahrizat would then “know what to do”.

“She is not a junior member (of Cabinet), she is a senior member.

“My feeling is that probably she has not been well-advised and she probably thought that if Wanita Umno could accept it, then it should be okay,” he said.

During the just-concluded Umno annual assembly last year, Shahrizat, who is Wanita Umno chief, appeared to receive the support of the wing’s members despite drawing flak from the public over her alleged involvement in the NFC.

Shahrizat is on leave to facilitate investigations.

Shahrizat has since applied for three weeks' leave from her duties as Women, Community and Family Development minister pending the outcome of investigations. She has also filed a RM100 million defamation lawsuit against her accusers in PKR.

The cattle farming project hit national headlines following the Auditor-General's 2010 report last year and continued to hog the limelight after it was linked to Shahrizat's family.

PKR has since made several revelations relating to the scandal, including NFC's purchase of two luxury condominium units in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, and the alleged use of project funds to pay for Shahrizat and her family's personal expenses.

The opposition party also alleged that Shahrizat's family had used nearly RM600,000 from the NFC project funds to pay for their credit card bills in 2009.

PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli claimed that the Wanita Umno chief's husband and three children, all of whom sit on the NFC board, used funds from the RM250 million cattle farming project to pay credit card bills averaging over RM10,000 per month each across the year.

But NFCorp's management has maintained that the credit card expenses were solely for business purposes.

It has also denied allegations that funds from the RM250 million government loan were channelled into its accounts before the loan agreement was signed.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/soi-lek-bn-shahrizat-handled-nfc-scandal-poorly/>