

**BN political patronage under scrutiny after scandals uncovered**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 22 — Disclosures of financial scandals involving top Umno politicians in recent months are set to put political patronage under the spotlight in a year in which a general election is expected, observers say.

While allegations of impropriety in Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's family-run RM250 million National Feedlot Centre (NFC) have dominated headlines since November, scandals of lesser amounts linked to current and past members of the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration have also captured public imagination.

PKR has led calls for Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom to be charged for allegedly abusing zakat funds. — file pic

Political observers told The Malaysian Insider that with the nexus between politics and business coming under growing public scrutiny, "these scandals will stick."

"People are going to ask whether this government is serving the interests of politicians, or the majority of Malaysians who are not politicians," Centre for Public Policy Studies chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam told The Malaysian Insider.

Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) president Datuk Paul Low said the watchdog has seen public interest in corruption surge recently, with a survey last month showing 90 per cent of Malaysians would seize the opportunity to fight graft.

"It's clear that the public now won't just let this go away. These scandals will stick," he said.

PKR has repeatedly accused Wanita Umno chief Shahrizat and her family of abusing public funds in the national cattle farming project including up to RM27 million in land and property unrelated to cattle farming.

It has also led calls for Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom to be charged for allegedly abusing zakat funds after accusing the minister in charge of Islamic affairs of paying legal fees using RM63,650 in alms money.

A political consultant said the PM cannot afford such scandals in light of his political transformation stand. — file pic

An anonymous blogger TheWhistleblower711 has also alleged that former Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman and Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Awang Adek Hussin received RM300,000 and RM100,000 in bribes respectively from Gerbang Perdana managing director Yahya Abd Jalil.

But both Umno leaders denied the claim, with Azalina stating that it was payment for the sale of a classic car and Awang Adek saying the cash was for social programmes in Bachok, where he is division chief.

Former federal minister Tan Sri Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir also recently claimed that

BN handed out up to RM1,000 in previous election campaigns in attempts to buy votes, a tactic known as "bomb".

"People have always known these things happen. But Barisan Nasional is more vulnerable today and as Najib is trying to bring about political transformation, he cannot afford that kind of scandal.

"Now that Najib is pushing for reforms, any scandal can be magnified and cause damage," political consultant Ong Kian Ming said.

These recent disclosures have come in quick succession and potentially undermine the Najib administration's Government Transformation Programme (GTP) where fighting corruption is one of seven National Key Result Areas (NKRA).

Allegations of impropriety in Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's family-run National Feedlot Centre have dominated headlines since November. — file pic

The recent declaration of assets by the Penang executive council has also ensured the spotlight is firmly focused on political patronage, with Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng repeatedly pushing for the Cabinet to follow suit.

Chief Justice Tan Sri Arifin Zakaria also announced that judges will soon be required to declare their assets in order to ensure judicial integrity.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) advisory panel then upped the pressure on the federal government by stating that Najib has agreed in principle for Cabinet members and their families to declare their assets to the anti-graft body.

Although the BN chief has not commented on the announcement, de facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said ministers should only declare their assets to the PM.

PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli, who has made repeated exposes over the NFC, said even though there were billion-ringgit deals under scrutiny such as the RM9 billion for naval patrol vessels being pursued by DAP, they did not resonate with the grassroots.

"They don't encounter these things on a daily basis. But when it comes to being paid off to give a contract here, or a license there, the public can relate because they also have had to pay," he said.

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