

NFC still a 'mess', says PKR's Zuraida
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 26 — The entire national cattle-farming project is still in a “mess”, regardless of who said it, PKR Wanita chief Zuraida Kamaruddin said today.

She added that the federal government must now take full responsibility for the financial blowout that has resulted in the loss of millions of ringgit of taxpayers' money because it had approved the project in the first place.

“It's still in a mess, whatever they say and going by the books,” Zuraida (picture) told The Malaysian Insider today, on the heels of the Auditor-General's clarification yesterday that he had never described the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) project as a “mess” in his 2010 audit report, contrary to news reports.

The PKR lawmaker said both the government and the corporation picked to run the project were trying to divert from the real cause of the scandal that the Auditor-General was trying to make clear.

“The money goes from the government to the National Feedlot Corporation and the National Feedlot Centre is just where they run the project,” the Ampang MP pointed out.

She said that the federal government must stop the mismanagement of public funds from continuing by immediately moving to take stock of whatever infrastructure and facilities had been invested into the project.

She added that the government should then immediately terminate the contract it has with the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) for mismanagement and then proceed with legal action to recover the rest of its losses.

She stressed that the government needed to do this because it had been entrusted with the public's money and had to ensure that the original agenda of the cattle project, to lower Malaysia's dependence on meat imports, would be met.

Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang was reported saying again today that there were several weaknesses in the implementation of the feedlot centre project.

“Why else would the government have, in May 2009, postponed the implementation pending viability and business model studies on the centre?” he was quoted as saying today by The Star newspaper.

“Whether there are elements of misappropriation is for authorities like the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate,” he was quoted saying, adding that his audit department made no mention of misappropriation of funds as it was beyond the scope of its powers.

Ambrin said the audit was to determine whether the centre had been carefully planned,

prudently carried out and met its objective.

“Audit analysis showed the objective of the centre had not been fully met and this was due to various factors as explained in the Auditor-General’s Report 2010,” he said.

In his report, the project did not meet its production target of 38,600 head of cattle in 2010 because the Entrepreneur Development Programme involving 130 satellite farm entrepreneurs had not been implemented.

He also said NFCorp was a RM1 share registered company with the Ministry of Finance Incorporated, adding that the RM1.1 million in paid-up capital had been contributed by Agrosience Industries Sdn Bhd, owned by the Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Ministry.

The publicly-funded company hit the headlines following last year’s Auditor-General’s Report, and has continued to hog the limelight after it was linked to minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil’s family.

PKR has since made several revelations relating to the scandal, including NFCorp’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 has also alleged that Shahrizat’s family used nearly RM600,000 from NFCorp’s funds to settle their credit card bills in 2009.

But the management of NFCorp 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.

Shahrizat applied for three weeks’ leave from her duties two weeks ago after new allegations of bribery surfaced.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced last week that the government would appoint an auditor to scrutinise NFCorp’s books in light of PKR’s accusations.

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