

NFCorp on the hook for cattle project, says Noh Omar
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PETALING JAYA, Jan 28 — Datuk Seri Noh Omar admitted today that the controversial National Feedlot Centre (NFC) and the company running it were separate entities, but insisted the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) was contractually responsible for the project.

“It needs the commitment from both sides,” the agricultural and agro-based industries minister told reporters when asked if NFCorp was responsible for the national cattle farming project’s weaknesses.

Noh clarified that there were two agreements signed: one for the RM250 million loan and a second detailing the project’s implementation, which was finalised in 2010.

The agreements leave NFCorp as the sole operator of the NFC, with the RM250 million loan available for the company to pursue the agreed targets — targets the Auditor-General’s report for 2010 said were not attained.

“Both must help each other, that’s why there’s a contract,” he added, saying the NFC and NFCorp needed one another to provide the best beef production service to the country.

Previously, the company owned by family of senior Umno minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said the Auditor-General had confused the NFC project with its operators, NFCorp.

Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang had stated in his 2010 report that there were several weaknesses in the implementation of the feedlot centre project.

In his report, he highlighted that 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.

“Why else would the government have, in May 2009, postponed the implementation pending viability and business model studies on the centre?” he was reported saying again earlier this week.

Pressured to clarify what was meant by the word “mess”, Ambrin had explained the audit was to determine whether the centre had been carefully planned, prudently carried out and met its objective.

He also denied his audit department had mentioned misappropriation of funds, as alleged, saying, “Whether there are elements of misappropriation is for authorities like the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate.”

Noh said today he would apprise Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin of the latest developments affecting NFC.

Several public interest groups have called on the prime minister to set up a royal inquiry on the scandal-tainted project but Muhyiddin has said the government will not support its establishment.

The publicly-funded NFCorp hit the headlines following last year's Auditor-General's Report, and has continued to hog the limelight after it was linked to Shahrizat'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 another in Singapore as well as 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 after new allegations of bribery surfaced. She is scheduled to resume her ministerial duties next week.

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