

Shahrizat's slow and steady decline
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 — Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's resignation from Cabinet today comes after a roller-coaster four years since losing her Lembah Pantai seat in Election 2008.

After four-and-a-half months of being dogged by allegations she and her family used a RM250 million federal loan for the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) to finance over RM62 million in land, property and expenses unrelated to cattle farming, the senator finally threw in the towel.

She leaves her women, family and community development portfolio in Cabinet but clings on to the leadership of Wanita Umno.

Despite the shock loss to 27-year-old Nurul Izzah, daughter of Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, in March 2008, Shahrizat was appointed by Tun Abdullah Badawi as Special Adviser to the Prime Minister for Women and Social Development Affairs.

The former prime minister's rationale was to have Wanita Umno represented in Cabinet although he dropped then Wanita Umno chief Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz, who had retained her Kuala Kangsar seat, as international trade and industry minister.

The 58-year-old pressed home her advantage and defeated Rafidah to take over the reins of the wing in party polls a year later, prompting Datuk Seri Najib Razak to appoint her as senator and return her to the portfolio she has held since 2001.

But her resignation after her family was embroiled in the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) saga leaves her in a similar situation as other Barisan Nasional top brass such as MCA president and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin.

Shahrizat will continue to lead what Najib calls the "backbone" of the party but without the stature and influence over government policymaking that comes with a Cabinet post.

She had resisted pressure to step down from within her own party including repeated calls by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who told her to go before being "chased out of the party."

Her persistence led her name and the NFC to become ubiquitous in opposition ceramahs, with speakers taking turns to come up with new cow and condo related jibes.

Penang-born Shahrizat, who first became Lembah Pantai MP in 1995, had successfully defended the seat twice on the back of her efforts to resettle squatters there, claiming that 90 per cent have been legally housed.

But she will more likely be remembered for insisting "she is only the wife" of the NFCorp chairman when insisting there was no wrongdoing in the 2006 award of the RM250 million

cattle farming project to the family of a Cabinet minister.

Although the move may ease pressure on the Najib administration, she and her family will still have to face up to ongoing investigations by police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

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