

## **Shahrizat's hubby charged with CBT in NFC scandal**

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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 12 — Datuk Seri Mohamed Salleh Ismail was charged today in the Sessions Court here with criminal breach of trust and violating the Companies Act in relation to RM49 million in federal funds given to the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp).

He pleaded not guilty to the CBT charge as well two counts under the Companies Act in the scandal that has opened Datuk Seri Najib Razak and the Barisan Nasional (BN) government to damaging attacks ahead of elections expected soon.

The 64-year-old was charged under Section 409 of the Penal Code relating to CBT for misappropriating RM9,758,140 from NFCorp's funds to purchase two condominium units at the One Menerung complex in Bangsar for the National Meat and Livestock Corporation (NMLC) on December 1 and December 4, 2009.

Mohamad Salleh was also charged under the same section for transferring RM40 million of NFCorp's funds to the NMLC between May 6 and November 16, 2009.

He was further charged in both cases for using the said funds without any approval from company's annual general meeting, which is an offence under Section 132 of the Companies Act 1965.

If found guilty, he faces between two and 20 years' imprisonment, whipping, and a fine for the offences under the Penal Code.

Mohamad Salleh also faces a five-year jail term or RM30,000 fine for the charges proffered under the Companies Act.

The charges were read out to the NFCorp executive chairman while his wife, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, sat two rows behind him together with relatives and supporters.

Only one of their three children, Izmir, was present in court.

The other two children — Izran and Izzana — who together with their brother, are directors of the company running the national cattle-farming project, were not present.

It is unclear if they will also face criminal charges.

Defence counsel Badrulmunir Bukhari, acting on behalf of lawyer Datuk Seri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah who is currently overseas, applied for bail to be set at RM50,000 for each charge.

"The accused is here to clear his name of (the) charges... there is no flight risk. He (Mohamad Salleh) has given full co-operation to the authorities so far," argued the lawyer.

Sessions Court judge SM Komathy Suppiah, however, ruled that bail be set at RM500,000.

"To ensure there is no disparity and allegations made, I set the bail at RM500,000 with one

surety with the condition that the accused surrenders his passport to the court," she said.

The case is set for mention next month on April 13.

Both Shahrizat and Izmir appeared teary-eyed and emotional after the charges were read, and refused to speak when approached later for comments.

Bail was posted by Izmir while Shahrizat left immediately after the mention date was set.

Shahrizat said yesterday she would step down as minister for women, family and community development when her term as senator ends on April 8 after months of attacks from the opposition.

The authorities were forced by public anger as a result of allegations made by opposition politicians to investigate whether her family had used part of a RM250 million ringgit loan from the government to the NFCorp to buy condominiums both at home and abroad.

The scandal has highlighted the prime minister's stuttering reform efforts and the decision to sacrifice Shahrizat politically is seen as a damage control exercise as Najib is expected to call elections within the next few months.

It is understood that Najib wants to call elections soon to take advantage of a recent spike in public approval ratings likely sparked by his decision to dish out direct aid to the public.

A looming global economic slowdown could jeopardise BN's chances at the polls which must be called by early next year.

The NFCorp mess is not the first corruption scandal to hit Najib and Umno, but the farmyard connection makes it a potentially damaging one because many ordinary Malaysians have a better understanding of what allegedly transpired than more obscure financial matters.

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