

Team Shahrizat strikes back at Wanita Umno deputy
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 22 — Wanita Umno's pro-Shahrizat faction shot back at their deputy Datuk Kamilia Ibrahim today, insisting her repeated demands for their leader's resignation were not shared by the wing's majority.

In a short statement claiming to represent Wanita Umno's top echelon, including its central leadership and state chiefs, the wing insisted that Kamilia's latest call for Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's resignation stemmed from "her own agenda and personal view".

"It does not at all give the true picture of what is happening in Umno's women movement regarding that particular issue (National Feedlot Centre or 'NFC') whether at the exco level, state, division or even the grassroots," the statement said.

Kamilia, one of Shahrizat's more vocal critics from within Umno, said in a report in The Star today that it was not enough for her chief to step down as federal minister next month and urged the latter to also retire as head of Wanita Umno and Wanita Barisan Nasional (BN).

She claimed that the public thought something was "morally and politically wrong" with how National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) was run and that this was affecting polls preparations.

NFCorp is headed by Shahrizat's husband, Datuk Seri Mohamad Salleh Ismail, who has been charged with criminal breach of trust for allegedly misusing the cattle-rearing company's federal loan.

"I've gone down to the grassroots and this is generally what the members are saying. They are finding it hard to meet the people when the image of their leader is tarnished," Kamilia told the daily.

"People are poking fun at Wanita and calling us 'cows'. The Wanita grassroots are saying it's difficult to work (for the general election)... As a leader, we have to listen to what the grassroots are saying."

But the wing's other leaders insisted today that support for the embattled Shahrizat remains "very united and robust".

They cited as example the massive show of support for Shahrizat during her recent expedition to several states and launch of the "Sayang 1 Malaysia" series in Pasir Gudang, Johor.

"We, as exco members and Wanita Umno state chiefs, would like to stress that we will always offer our undivided support to Shahrizat's leadership as Malaysia's Wanita Umno chief," they concluded.

Shahrizat announced on March 11 that she would step down as women, family and community minister when her term as senator expires on April 8.

Her announcement came after nearly five months of allegations that she and her family had used a RM250 million government soft loan earmarked for NFCorp to pay for personal expenses, among others.

NFCorp, which supervises the National Feedlot Centre (NFC), hit national headlines after the company made it into the Auditor-General's Report last year for missing production targets.

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