

Najib's backing for Shahrizat shows failure as reformist, says Pakatan
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, March 25 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak's decision to keep Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil as Wanita Umno chief shows the prime minister's willingness to endorse "tainted" leaders, Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers said.

Opposition MPs said that Najib's insistence in keeping Shahrizat despite objections from within her own Wanita Umno wing was a reflection of his failure as a reformist, in keeping his administration and party free from allegedly corrupt figures.

"To win elections, Najib has shown his willingness to nominate tainted leaders such as (Tan Sri) Isa Samad, who was suspended by Umno itself of vote buying, to stand for elections and to head Felda.

"The man of the street will judge Najib and Umno as a leader and party willing to tolerate corrupt, cronyism and unethical practices, and forego the principles of good governance and integrity," DAP national publicity secretary Tony Pua told The Malaysian Insider.

Pua said Umno has had a record of axing its members who failed to perform during elections but at the same time keeping those involved in scandals.

"It is not for us to insist if Shahrizat is to give up or retain her Wanita Umno post, it's for Umno members to decide.

"Their decision will however reflect the type of politics Umno stands for, and whether Malaysians think Umno fit to lead the country," the Petaling Jaya Utara MP added.

PAS research chief Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad echoed Pua's views, and said that Najib's compromise decision on Shahrizat was a "paradoxical" one.

"How can Najib tell the country that this lady is unfit to become minister but at the same time competent to carry on as Wanita Umno chief?" he told The Malaysian Insider.

"Najib would have saved his entire administration if he had been steadfast in asking Shahrizat to leave right from the start," Dzulkefly added.

PKR vice president Nurul Izzah Anwar said that Shahrizat's case was a classic example of "double standards" practiced by Umno, whereby its leaders are tolerated as long as they continue to be indispensable to Barisan Nasional (BN).

"If you're out of favour, the truth doesn't seem to matter. So much for Najib's credibility as a reformer," she told The Malaysian Insider.

PM Najib has insisted there was no reason for Shahrizat to cease being Wanita Umno chief as there is no proof or charge of wrongdoing in the RM250 million National Feedlot Centre

(NFC) scandal. Although Shahrizat announced on March 11 she would step down as women, family and community development minister when her senatorship ends on April 8, the veteran politician said she would continue to lead the 1.3-million strong wing.

Shahrizat was called in for questioning by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) last month over allegations she and her family abused a RM250 million federal loan meant for the national cattle farming scheme but has not been hauled up to court.

However, her husband Datuk Seri Mohamad Salleh Ismail, who owns the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) with their three children, pleaded not guilty on March 12 to criminal breach of trust and offences under the Companies Act in relation to RM49 million in public funds.

Najib also said he had met Shahrizat and her vice chief Datuk Kamilia Ibrahim and the duo had agreed to cooperate despite the latter recently calling for Shahrizat to relinquish leadership of the wing.

The Umno president's remarks left open the possibility of Shahrizat contesting the next general elections or making a future comeback to revive her political career which had appeared earlier to have been buried by the scandal.

Najib also shrugged off suggestions that Shahrizat's continued leadership of the wing would hurt Barisan Nasional's election preparations.

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