

Anwar: Najib lacks courage to sack Shahrizat
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 26 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim sniped at rival Datuk Seri Najib Razak today for lacking the “courage” to axe senior politician Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil from the helm of Wanita Umno.

The Pakatan Rakyat (PR) de facto leader said Najib’s failure to punish the federal minister shows that he condones such cases of corruption and excesses within the party that he leads.

“It’s not a matter of Shahrizat (resigning); it’s a matter of the weak leadership of Najib.

“He has been very inconsistent and he does not have the courage to deal with the issues of discipline within his own party and that shows his glaring incompetence as a PM (prime minister) who has been harping on the issues of good governance, transparency... [and claiming to be] a great reformer but one who condones these excesses,” he told reporters when approached in Parliament today.

The PKR de facto leader, who was himself sacked from his post as Umno deputy president in 1998 over allegations of sodomy and corruption, agreed that Najib’s refusal to coax an unequivocal resignation from Shahrizat may result in a public backlash for the prime minister.

He said Malaysians would now view Najib as a weak leader and one who was unable to deal with indiscipline within his party ranks.

“And how can such a leader be trusted to govern?” he asked.

Earlier during a press conference in Parliament, Wanita PKR chief Zuraida Kamaruddin said Najib’s refusal to strip Shahrizat of the Wanita Umno chief post would help PR prove his weak leadership to Malaysians.

The Ampang MP said Najib had failed to realise his political transformation plans from within Umno itself, even slapping the prime minister with the label, “ayam jantan yang berkokok berderai-derai, tapi ekor bergelumang tahi” (a rooster that crows loudly but has a tail smeared with faeces).

Zuraida, who has been among those leading PR’s attack on Shahrizat over the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scandal, slammed the minister for her refusal to relinquish her Wanita Umno post, saying it would have been a good opportunity for her to clean Umno’s tarnished image.

“I urge Malaysian women to distance themselves from the Wanita Umno wing, which has failed to save themselves from this situation and were willing to allow themselves to be led by the nose.

"Times have changed... I believe Malaysian women will reject this weak and unprincipled Wanita Umno wing," she told a press conference in Parliament today.

Najib had insisted last week that 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 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 co-operate 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 election or making a future comeback to revive her political career that had earlier appeared 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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