

Recover RM250m from NFCorp now, Pua tells Putrajaya
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 29 — DAP MP Tony Pua today demanded Putrajaya immediately recover the RM250 million loan granted to the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) now that the scandal-ridden firm is no longer in charge of the country's national cattle-farming scheme.

The Petaling Jaya Utara MP said added that any failure to do so would render the government's pronouncements on making good the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scheme a mere "public relations damage-control exercise" and "political rhetoric".

He pointed out that recovering the monies from NFCorp, which is run by the family of federal minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, was even more necessary now that the government was inviting bids from other firms to take over the NFC project.

"In public interest, and to ensure that every sen of taxpayers' monies is recoverable, both ministries must immediately demand the return of the RM250 million loan given to NFCorp, whose directors are the family (members) of Umno Wanita chief Shahrizat," he said, referring to the Finance Ministry and Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry.

Pua (picture) added that it would be "against all common sense" to allow NFCorp's directors to continue enjoying the benefits of the loan, a portion of which opposition lawmakers have alleged were siphoned off for expenses unrelated to the NFC.

"As it stands, the two per cent interest loan was fully drawn down even before the 'implementation agreement' (between Putrajaya and NFCorp) was signed has been abused by the NFCorp directors to acquire luxury properties... and to invest in unrelated businesses under their own names," he said.

Pua, who was speaking at a press conference in Parliament here, was responding to Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar who had told the House earlier this week that the government was inviting tenders to take over the NFC project.

But Pua also asked if the government had already terminated its agreement with NFCorp, NFC's original project implementer, and said the invitation for tenders would otherwise be a breach of its agreement with the firm.

"The Ministry of Agriculture has an existing 'implementation agreement' for the NFC signed with NFCorp on March 8, 2010," he pointed out.

He then questioned the signing of the agreement, repeating his earlier claim that the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry had yet to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the project to justify the project's viability.

The analysis, said Pua, had been requested by the Finance Ministry when it issued a halt

order on the project in May 2009, according to the Auditor-General's 2010 report.

"This has, of course, raised the earlier question as to why an 'implementation agreement' was signed in 2010 when a halt to the project was directed in 2009," he said.

"Regardless, now that Noh has announced the request for new bids, does it mean that the study has indeed been carried out and the project's viability approved by the Finance Ministry?" he asked.

Pua noted that according to the Public Accounts Committee's (PAC) inquiries to both ministries as late as last week, no such study had been carried out to date.

PKR had alleged yesterday that Putrajaya's latest move to invite bids to run the NFC was an attempt to cover up the RM250 million scandal, and that the prime minister should be held directly responsible.

PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli said the main issue in the scandal was Datuk Seri Najib Razak's own involvement in the matter, when he had allowed a RM250 million federal project to be given to NFCorp.

"This reflects the carelessness on the prime minister's part which led to a possibility of misappropriation (of the loan) as well as criminal breach of trust.

"This has not been answered, and yet the PM wants to invite news bids... this shows his intention to cover up his mistakes for awarding the contract to an undeserving party," said Rafizi in a statement yesterday.

NFC hit the headlines last year when the Auditor-General reported it had missed its targets. NFCorp chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mohamed Salleh Ismail was later alleged to have misused the government allocation of RM250 million for the cattle rearing project.

On March 12, Mohamed Salleh, who is Shahrizat's husband, pleaded not guilty at the Sessions Court here to two counts of criminal breach of trust involving RM49.7 million with regard to the purchase of two condominium units and two other charges under the Companies Act.

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