

## **Pak Lah defends Shahrizat in cattle-farm scandal**

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**By Syed Mu'az Syed Putra**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 15 — Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil need not quit the Cabinet to take the heat for her family's alleged mess of the RM250 million National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) cattle-farm scandal.

Abdullah, who was prime minister from October 2003 to April 2009, waded into the controversy today to defend the Wanita Umno chief after she came under attack from a partyman.

Kinabatangan MP Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin had demanded the senator quit the Cabinet and take responsibility for her family's alleged mishandling of the national project.

"Ask the individual concerned. What's it got to do with Shahrizat? It's her husband... Shahrizat's not involved, so don't ask her," Abdullah (picture) told reporters.

"If Shahrizat were the CEO then sure [you can ask her] but right now she's not involved and it is very unfair to label her as involved," said the ex-PM, popularly known as Pak Lah, echoing Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Shahrizat, who has headed the Women, Family and Community Ministry since 2001, is married to NFC executive director Datuk Mohamad Salleh Ismail. Their three children run the cattle business.

Allegations of financial impropriety have dogged the company owned by Shahrizat's family after the Auditor-General revealed last month that the NFC had failed to meet production targets for 2010 despite benefiting from a RM134.72 million soft loan from the government.

The Malaysian Insider understands the NFC started operations in 2008, during Abdullah's administration. At that time, Muhyiddin was the agriculture and agro-based minister.

The Auditor-General's Report also criticised the NFC, pointing out that it was now "in a mess".

The report said production in 2010 was only 3,289 head of cattle or 41.1 per cent of the target set.

But Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar responded on October 31 that the project is a success and had met its targets.

He said a total of RM250 million was earmarked for the NFC project and placed in a special loan account in Maybank that was controlled by the Finance Ministry.

He said RM181 million from that account has already been disbursed to NFC based on its claims.

But opposition politicians have alleged that RM10 million of the money for the cattle project had instead been used to buy a luxury condominium in Bangsar, a high-end suburb in the

capital city.

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