

NFC: Only a full disclosure will do

HOT FUSS

By TERENCE FERNANDEZ



THE saga of the embattled National Feedlot Centre (NFC) project and the company tasked to implement it, the National Feedlot Corporation (NFCorp) seems like a bottomless pit of scandals as Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) keeps producing one allegation after another.

Despite announcing her impending resignation as Women, Family and Community Development Minister yesterday, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and her family who runs NFCorp must be having sleepless nights as they wonder what else PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli would be pulling out from under his sleeves.

Like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, almost every week, Rafizi has called for press conferences to reveal one NFCorp purchase after another. Be it million-ringgit apartments in Singapore or Kazakhstan; hundreds of thousands of ringgit in credit card charges or the purchase of luxury office suites in Bangsar, the NFC issue certainly has kept the and her family awake at

night. It has certainly made Rafizi a household name and have taxpayers seething over the perceived favouritism involved in awarding the project and the RM250 million soft loan given to NFCorp to run the project, and the re-directing of this government injection to non-cattle rearing expenses.

Undoubtedly, Rafizi and PKR have hit the jackpot by targeting Shahrizat — who not being the most publicity savvy politician did not do herself any favours by using her platform as Wanita Umno chief at the Umno general assembly to defend her family. This only opened herself up to criticisms from some of her own party members, including heavyweights like her predecessor Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz.

If she maintains that she is not involved in NFCorp and was not in the loop over what happened (pillow talk notwithstanding), she should have just allowed her husband, NFCorp chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Salleh Ismail and the company to answer the allegations — something she has only just practised but is a case of too little too late as it has already cost her ministerial post.

For the people to be upset and disgusted is putting it mildly. But in assessing the



FLASHBACK: Our report on Feb 29

NFC issue, one should not look at the situation myopically. While the NFCorp has yet to give answers that would satisfy everyone, one should also look beyond Shahrizat and her family.

Rafizi is not doing the nation any favours by revealing piecemeal information, instead of exposing everything at one go and then reporting to the authorities — providing them with all the information we know he has.

But as a politician, one understands he needs to keep the issue alive especially when a general election is looming. And yes, pressmen are guilty of doing the same at times. But knowing the

short-term memory of Malaysians, perhaps it is a good strategy to get around the people's general apathy and tendency to forget quickly.

But as mentioned earlier, it is not sufficient to just call for the blood of Shahrizat and the NFCorp executives (three of whom are her children).

One must also put on notice those who approved the project, agreed to the soft loan and who were supposed to keep their end of the deal to ensure that the project is successful.

Last Wednesday, *The Malay Mail* revealed that the project was halted half-way — two years after it was awarded

— to make way for a feasibility study. It was a case of putting the cart before the horse, and NFCorp had by then drawn down part of the soft loan, for what it claimed is to get the project going.

On top that, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industries had reneged on its obligations to build an abattoir — which was part of the NFC project and which it got RM60 million from the Ministry of Finance for.

And for these agencies — the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) included — to sit idly by while NFCorp takes all the heat is an imbalanced apportioning of blame.

Meanwhile, the police and

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) are trying to wrap their heads around the issue with its subplots of a “Mr Fix It” and the war of words between NFCorp and Bukit Aman Commercial Crimes chief Datuk Syed Ismail Syed Azizan.

Salleh told *The Malay Mail* that NFCorp will respond to the rakyat and we shall hold him to his word. And since he has committed to it, nothing but a full disclosure would be acceptable — even if it means implicating more individuals and laying bare the failures of those in government; the complicity of officials either by their acts, omissions and turning a blind eye; and those who took an oath to protect the public interest.

The people demand it and the people deserve to know. Anything less will only lead to an anti-climax, raising more questions than providing answers.

The last recourse for a straight-forward answer then will be in the courts, and hopefully when this happens all the players — not just NFCorp will be made to account.

Terence says everyone should stop the bull and come clean on NFC.
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