

## **FBC paid RM84mil 'to spruce up nation's image'**

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The government had paid 19.6 million euros (RM83.8 million) to media consultancy company FBC Media for the duration of three years from 2007.

NONE In a written parliamentary reply to Tian Chua (PKR-Batu), Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said the payment was for “consultancy services, advice and management of a communication campaign”.

“The yearly contract was renewed twice and terminated in 2010. The value of the contract for the three years was 19.6 million Euros,” Najib said.

The PM was also asked if the government had instructed FBC Media to produce programmes broadcast for a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news segment, and the justifications for such a move.

“The production and broadcast of programmes on Malaysia in international media was part of our efforts to improve Malaysia’s profile internationally, as stipulated in the contract with FBC Media,” he said.

However, Najib said that the government had no say over when the programmes are aired.

“This was negotiated between FBC Media and the BBC,” he said.

PR work disguised as journalism

International broadcasters CNBC, BBC and US magazine The Atlantic have all launched internal investigations into the connections with FBC.

FBC has been accused of providing editorial content on foreign subjects while doing public relations work for the same governments it was reporting on.

This scandal was first uncovered by Sarawak Report, a portal founded by former BBC journalist Clare Rewcastle-Brown, the sister-in-law of former British prime minister Gordon Brown.

It claimed that FBC was paid millions of ringgit by BN politicians, including Najib and long-serving Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud, to glam up their image overseas.

Backing their claims were a RM28.35 million entry in Sarawak’s Supplementary Budget 2010 Bill which showed that FBC was allocated RM28.35 million for work on a ‘Global Strategic Communications Campaign’ ordered in 2009. The company had received RM29.34 million the previous year.

British-based daily The Independent also reported that documents filed with the US House of Representatives in 2008 show that FBC contracted the Washington-based American lobbying company Apco Worldwide.

Chua, quoting British newspaper The Independent, said FBC had created at least four documentary series for Malaysia, including a public relations piece on the palm oil industry, treatment of natives and deforestation.