

Nazri: Hiring of FBC Media broke no laws

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If the United Kingdom-based FBC Media hired by the government for communications work had committed any offence or broken any law, none involved “criminal elements” in that engagement by Malaysia.

NONE“This is more of possible breaches of UK (broadcasting ethics and) guidelines. There is no criminal element in it being engaged by us per se,” Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz (left) told the Dewan Rakyat during Question Time today.

Responding to the question from Mohd Hatta Md Ramli (PAS-Kuala Krai) , Nazri said the government’s three-year contract with FBC Media as a communications consultant from 2007 to 2010, which cost taxpayers 19.6 million euros or RM84.7 million) , succeeded in forging closer ties between Malaysia and Western nations.

“Since we engaged FBC, we saw an increase in the acceptance of Western countries towards the leadership of Premier Najib Abdul Razak,” praised Nazri.

FBC programmes featuring Malaysia had also propagated more content about the country on foreign airwaves, he added.

These programmes have been said to breach broadcasting ethics and guidelines by allegedly pushing content about FBC's consultancy clients, including Malaysia, as news items to major networks such as BBC and CNN.

The global media giant has since suspended its contracts with FBC over the allegations, resulting in the PR firm facing bankruptcy.

FBC 'more effective' than M'sian missions

In his subsequent supplementary question to Nazri, Mohd Hatta asked what was being done by Malaysian embassies and agencies like Matrade, which could have done the same job that the country paid so much for FBC to undertake.

“What are the shortcomings of the agencies that are supposed to undertake those duties, that we have to turn to FBC,” queried Mohd Hatta.

Nazri replied that the job the government engaged FBC specifically for was to make inroads and market introductions into Europe and the UK.

He argued that the Malaysian agencies and embassies staffed by officers who are rotated every three years do not have the long-term contacts and networking required to make such inroads.

Thus, Nazri posited, FBC “is more effective” for the task at hand, which Malaysian agencies and embassies could not hope to match, arguing that the same held true with countries and companies that want to make inroads into Malaysia.

“They too will turn to Malaysian firms to help them,” he concluded.