

BBC apologises for airing paid PR pieces
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The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has apologised for airing sponsored current affairs programmes which includes eight that featured Malaysia.

In a statement posted on the BBC website yesterday, the broadcaster said the “small number” of programmes that were aired on BBC World News between Feb 2009 and July 2011, broke the internal rules aimed at protecting its editorial integrity.

“These rules ensure that programmes are free, and are seen to be free, from commercial or other outside pressures,” read the statement.

Although the nature of programmes unrelated to Malaysia were mentioned without much details, the BBC made it clear that eight programmes “appeared” to have a financial relationship with the Malaysian government.

“This meant there was a potential conflict of interest, though the BBC was not aware of it when the programmes were broadcast,” read the statement.

The statement made no direct mention of London-based PR firm FBC Media Ltd which produced the eight documentary programmes.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had admitted to Parliament that it had paid 19.6 million euros (RM80 million) to FBC Media between 2007 and 2010 to spruce up Malaysia’s image.

Among others, the documentaries painted a rosy picture of Malaysia's oil palm industry and treatment of indigenous peoples.

Yesterday, British daily The Independent, the newspaper that broke the scandal, reported that the BBC would be apologising to an estimated 74 million people globally over the matter.

The report said viewers from “Kuala Lumpur to Khartoum” will be able to watch the broadcast which is available to 295 million homes, 1.7 million hotel rooms, 81 cruise ships, 46 airlines and 35 mobile phone platforms, at four different time zones.

According to the BBC statement, the BBC Trust’s editorial standards committee had identified various breaches in editorial guidelines due to the errant programmes.

“It agreed that given the serious nature of the breaches an on-air apology to the audience was appropriate,” read the statement.

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