

'BN pays RM1.2mil for anti-Anwar propaganda in US'
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BN or its associates have allegedly paid several opinion writers to write propaganda articles for mainstream US publications, which US-based online news portal BuzzFeed said is focused on PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

The revelation was made after Joshua Trevino (right), described as a conservative pundit, filed a compulsory disclosure on Feb 24 under a US law that requires foreign agents to register themselves.

The document has been posted on the US Department of Justice's Foreign Agents Registration Act (Fara) website.

The seven-page document reveals that lobbying companies Apco Worldwide, David All Group and FBC Media had engaged Trevino between May 2008 and April 2011 to act on behalf of the "government of Malaysia, its ruling party, or interests closely aligned with either".

He was paid a total of US\$389,724.70 (about RM1.2 million) and a trip to Kuala Lumpur for his work, which included blogging on the now-defunct websites malaysiamatters.com, malaysiawatcher.com, and commissioning the works of 10 opinion writers, some of whom are known to be pro-Israel.

However, Trevino, then the director of consultant group Trevino Strategies and Media Inc, claimed in the document that the writers had editorial independence and the publication of their work is not subject to his or his client's prior approval.

"To be blunt with you, and I think the filing is clear about this, it was a lot looser than a typical PR (public relation) operation. I wanted to respect these guys' independence and not have them be placement machines," BuzzFeed quoted him saying.

Trevino himself had also written about Malaysia on a blog on the US newspaper Huffington Post, including one post in Aug 2010 that defended Anwar's then ongoing Sodomy II trial.

His other articles, as well as some of the commissioned works from other authors, were in support of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's 'Global Movement of Moderates' and Najib's other efforts to bolster interfaith relations.

Other authors that Trevino hired also asserted their independence when Buzzfeed contacted them for comment, including conservative writer Ben Domenech.

"I did not ever have anyone looking over my shoulder for what I wrote, and the guidance really was just to write about the political fray there and give my own opinion,

"Of course, Josh picked me knowing what my opinion was - I stand by what I wrote at the time and I continue to be critical of Anwar, who I think is a particularly dangerous fellow," he was quoted saying in the article published yesterday.

Trevino's articles removed

BuzzFeed also noted that Trevino had previously lost contracts for a column on the UK newspaper Guardian for failing to disclose his financial interests in Malaysia, while Huffington Post has followed suit after the latest exposé.

This was despite having earlier denied that he was on Malaysian payroll when the matter arose in 2011. His articles were subsequently removed from both websites.

According to BuzzFeed, Trevino now claims that he was approached for the job by publicist David All in 2008 and never had any contact with his ultimate client.

"I only had an assumption of who I was working for. I never knew exactly who Apco was dealing with, never knew exactly who FBC was dealing with," he reportedly said.

When asked why did he made the filing five years late, he reportedly said that he was unaware that he is legally required to register under Fara at the time, but was later allowed to make the filing retrospectively after he found out about it.

Trevino has reportedly stopped working for Malaysian interests when he joined the Texas Public Policy Foundation at an unspecified date.

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