

PKR says Putrajaya must answer for FBC fiasco
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 18 — The Najib administration has now put the Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) under a new company from September 1, taking it away from another government unit, Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd.

A government statement today said the Cabinet approved the setting up of the new owner, MRT Co, under the Ministry of Finance Incorporated.

"MRT Co will assume these roles from Syarikat Prasarana Negara Berhad (Prasarana) with effect from 1 September 2011.

PETALING JAYA, Aug 18 — PKR is demanding Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak explain his administration's use of millions of ringgit in taxpayers' money to hire British firm FBC Media for publicity, even as Malaysia's international image has instead grown more ragged.

In a statement today, PKR communications chief Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad noted that the UK's media regulator the Office of Communications (Ofcom) had waded into the controversy surrounding Malaysia's move to pay millions of pounds for publicity disguised as news to burnish its image globally.

He said Putrajaya and Kuching have been found out to have paid FBC hundreds of millions of ringgit for strategic communications services and the production of friendly content for their governments, stressing that such an exercise was "clearly in contravention of fundamental media laws and ethics".

The spotlight is on the relationship between FBC Media — the British publicity firm led by media giant Alan Friedman, which still lists Deferios as its group president — and broadcasters like CNBC, CNN and the BBC.

"Neither Putrajaya nor Kuching has denied or admitted to the allegations. Considering the international media attention that this issue has raised, their silence is truly deafening.

"What is in dispute here is not the practice of hiring media advisory or public affairs firms, but rather these firms' use of paid content to unwarrantedly bolster the image of certain governments at the expense of objective reporting," he said.

The Selangor state lawmaker said Najib as PM must come clean on what he called the "FBC fiasco", as he further claimed public money was not used to boost the national image but Umno's interests.

Nik Nazmi said that both the federal government and the Sarawak government under Chief Minister Tan Sri Taib Mahmud "must now disclose their role in and extent of this illegal public relations campaign", more so after Najib's concession to his administration's failure in handling last month's Bersih 2.0 rally and media censorship of international weekly The Economist.

FBC Media's dealings with the Malaysian government came to light after supplementary supply Bills showed vast payments made for a "Global Strategic Communications Campaign".

The records showed that between 2008 and 2009, RM57.7 million was paid by the Prime Minister's Office to FBC Media for the campaign.

The Malaysian Insider understands that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) terminated FBC Media's contract in the past week, just months after another public relations firm, APCO Worldwide from the United States, met an ignominious end for alleged links to Israel.

Nik Nazmi also pointed out that FBC was also involved in engaging APCO Worldwide to lobby the US government on behalf of Barisan Nasional to promote Malaysia's pro-business and pro-reform credentials.

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