

## **Anti-nuke groups call PR plan 'waste of public funds'**

**The Malaysian Insider**

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**By Boo Su-Lyn**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 — Anti-nuclear groups have lambasted Putrajaya for planning to hire a foreign public relations firm to boost popular support for nuclear power, labelling the move "immoral and very unethical".

The Holmes Report, a New York-based publication that serves the public relations community, reported this week that the Malaysia Nuclear Power Corporation (MNPC) — a government body formed in January to spearhead the deployment of nuclear energy — was understood to have shortlisted three firms for the sensitive project.

"I think it's absolutely ridiculous and a total waste of public funds," Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) council member Mohideen Abdul Kader told The Malaysian Insider this week.

"No government should resort to this type of manipulating [of public opinion]... the government should be involved in trying to inform people, not through PR, but through proper discussions, debates, where ideas can be freely debated," he added.

Mohideen pointed out that there were sufficient experts in the country who could present different perspectives on nuclear energy through the media.

"So why are we trying to hire these foreign firms to come and brainwash through distorted and sometimes false information concerning the benefits of nuclear energy?" he asked.

The invitation for an international public relations effort to build support for nuclear energy could spark controversy after the recent row over reports that Putrajaya paid RM58 million to FBC Media to burnish its international image on various international broadcast channels.

British media regulator Office of Communications (Ofcom) is probing programmes made by FBC Media for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

It is understood Putrajaya has now ended its contract with FBC Media after an exposé revealed that Malaysian leaders routinely appeared in paid-for interviews on global television programmes on CNBC.

The latest plans to launch a publicity campaign for nuclear power also comes in the midst of public concern about nuclear safety, spurred by the ongoing crisis at the nuclear plant in Fukushima, Japan.

According to briefing notes obtained by the Holmes Report, public relations counsel is being sought to ensure that stakeholders can make an informed decision about the proposed alternative energy source by 2013.

But Centre for Environment, Technology and Development Malaysia (Cetdem) chairman Gurmit Singh insisted that there was no substitute for public debate.

"If necessary, have a public referendum on the issue. That's the way to go about it democratically. Otherwise, this is seen as a selfish, expensive way to get the public to not

oppose the project," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Gurmit said Malaysia could rely on other energy sources, such as generating renewable ocean energy off the coast of Sabah.

Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Seri Peter Chin said last December that Malaysia planned to build two nuclear power plants that would generate 1,000MW each — with the first plant ready for operation in 2021 and the second plant a year later — as part of a long-term plan to balance energy supply.

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