

PR for nuclear power window dressing, says Pakatan
The Malaysian Insider
September 02, 2011
By Yow Hong Chieh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 — The opposition has derided Putrajaya's plan to hire a public relations firm to boost popular support for nuclear power as more spin from an administration that they claimed was becoming known for more talk than action.

PKR communications director Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the revelation that the government will pick one of three shortlisted public relations agencies to help get greater buy-in for its planned nuclear power plants showed that the Najib administration was still more concerned with form over function.

"That speaks volumes about what the Najib administration is about. It's about PR," he told The Malaysian Insider.

The Seri Setia assemblyman pointed out that despite the barrage of feel-good news arising from the prime minister's transformation programmes, few of the latter's much-touted economic reforms have been translated into policy.

He said this was testament to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's failed leadership as "any Tom, Dick and Harry" could hire public relations firms to put across an appearance of change while real transformation had to be driven by political will.

"You look at substance, reforms, nothing much. There's a lot of talk... It's easy to say the right things but it's tricky to do the right thing," Nik Nazmi said.

DAP international secretary Liew Chin Tong similarly said politicians must take responsibility to communicate their ideas to the public directly as there was "no point" in hiring agencies without doing that first.

"Political leaders must take charge to communicate political vision... instead of trying to hard-sell something that is not palatable," he said.

Malaysia must also recognise it is not feasible to constantly increase power supply to meet the ever-growing demand for electricity and must adopt the global practice of demand management to cut down on usage, Liew added.

"You have to deal with demand... so that we can have a sustainable supply," the Bukit Bendera MP said.

"If the government is looking at demand management and also alternative sources of electricity, there may not be a need for a nuclear plant,"

PAS vice president Salahuddin Ayub said the government should be aware of the public's unhappiness over the proposed nuclear power plant, which he also felt was unsuitable for the time being given Malaysia's high potential for alternative energy.

"There are other energy alternatives to petrol and coal so, for the time being, it is not very important for us to initiate this kind of industry," he said.

He added that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) intends to highlight the nuclear power plant issue — which has attracted strong criticism from opposition parties and the public — at the next Parliament sitting in October.

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, has shortlisted three firms for the sensitive project.

The invitation for an international public relations effort to boost 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.

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

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

Global broadcasters, including CNN and CNBC, have been scrambling to contain any potential fallout after allegations of impropriety surfaced following the exposé by whistleblower Sarawak Report.

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 are able to make an informed decision about the proposed plan by that date.

Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Seri Peter Chin had said in December 2010 that Malaysia plans to build two nuclear power plants that will generate 1,000MW each, with the first plant ready for operation in 2021 and the second plant a year later, as part of the overall long-term plan to balance energy supply.

He said Malaysia was heavily reliant on gas and coal for its electricity supply and it was government policy to reduce dependence on fossil fuel. Gas accounted for 64 per cent of the country's energy generation while the remainder came from coal.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/pr-for-nuclear-power-window-dressing-says-pakatan/>