

FBC also approached top US journal to host Najib, says Politico
The Malaysian Insider
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 24 — Putrajaya's erstwhile image consultants, FBC Media, is said to have approached top US current affairs magazine The Atlantic to host an event featuring Datuk Seri Najib Razak, United States-based political website Politico reported yesterday.

It reported that The Atlantic has launched an internal inquiry into connections with the British public relations firm whose programmes have been pulled off the air by top broadcasters such as CNBC and BBC. FBC is also under investigation by British regulators for putting paid programmes in BBC as part of its RM58 million contract with Putrajaya.

"The magazine also said Justin Smith, president of Atlantic Media Co., has resigned from the board of FBC Media, the firm at the centre of a controversy over whether it improperly mixed its journalism and PR businesses. It was Smith who connected FBC Media with The Atlantic," Politico wrote.

Politico reported that FBC's chairman, Alan Friedman, blogged about governments that may have been current or onetime clients in his dispatches for The Atlantic from the World Economic Forum in Davos in January.

It added that Friedman also approached the magazine with a subscription of nearly half a million, about hosting an event featuring the Malaysian prime minister.

"The truth is that Alan Friedman has been a friend of mine for nearly 20 years. In light of this friendship and my past association with the company, I am very disturbed to learn of the serious allegations being raised about FBC and Alan's conduct.

"What I would particularly regret, should these accusations directed at FBC be proven true, is my role in having introduced Alan to The Atlantic's editors and event planners. I have directed a full review of The Atlantic's dealings with him, and the responsibility at The Atlantic for any problems it might uncover will be mine," Smith was quoted by Politico as saying.

Najib himself has refused to comment on allegations that Putrajaya paid RM58 million to FBC Media to burnish its international image on various international broadcast channels.

When asked by reporters about British media regulator Office of Communications' (Ofcom) probe into programmes made by FBC Media for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the prime minister said "I cannot comment on that."

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. Another public relations firm, APCO Worldwide from the United States, also met an ignominious end last year 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 website claimed the interviews and other programmes produced by FBC Media had cost the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition millions of ringgit as part of its bid to boost its international image.

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.

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