

Putrajaya paid RM94m to FBC Media for global airtime
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 11 — The Barisan Nasional (BN) government paid RM94 million to raise its international profile over three years to FBC Media, which is under probe by British regulators for producing content on Malaysia without revealing that Putrajaya was its client.

But the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) denied any involvement in how FBC Media secured coverage in the international press.

In a written reply to a question in Parliament, Datuk Seri Najib Razak's office said that the 12-month contract that was signed in 2007 was renewed twice for a total cost of €19.6 million.

"It is the responsibility of FBC Media to obtain airtime in international media and the government has no control over this matter.

"This is a matter of discussions between FBC Media and the BBC," the PMO replied to Batu MP Chua Tian Chang's question posed last Thursday.

Malaysia ended its contract with the public relations firm last year after it was revealed that government leaders routinely appeared in paid-for interviews on global television programmes on CNBC.

FBC is now being investigated by British media regulator Office of Communications (Ofcom) as well as the BBC and CNBC for producing content on Malaysia without revealing it received money from Putrajaya.

Both broadcasters have dropped FBC programmes from their lineup.

The PMO terminated FBC Media's contract last month, the second PR deal it has ended in recent months after US-based APCO Worldwide was dropped for alleged links to Israel.

Whistleblower website Sarawak Report had claimed that interviews and other programmes produced by FBC had cost the ruling BN coalition millions of ringgit as part of its bid to boost its international image.

The deal came to light after supplementary supply Bills showed that the PMO paid RM57.7 million between 2008 and 2009 to FBC for a "Global Strategic Communications Campaign".

FBC is also said to have approached top US current affairs magazine The Atlantic to host an event featuring Najib.

The Malaysian Insider also reported that Najib has engaged a new team that includes those behind former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's "New Labour" to reinvent himself as a "cool" leader as he prepares to lead BN into elections for the first time.

Chua, who is a PKR vice-president, told a press conference today that this proves "the Najib administration relies solely on consultants to spread Barisan Nasional propaganda on the

global stage.”

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