

Umno MPs call Azman Mokhtar, Tony Fernandes cheats in MAS-AirAsia share swap
The Malaysian Insider
November 14, 2011
By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 14 — Umno lawmakers accused Tan Sri Azman Mokhtar and Tan Sri Tony Fernandes today of cheating the public in the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and AirAsia share swap.

Kinabatangan MP Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin called on Khazanah chief executive Azman to be investigated by graftbusters after the state investment agency exchanged 20.5 per cent of the national carrier for a 10 per cent stake in Asia's top-performing budget airline.

"The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) must call Tan Sri Azman ... all of them ... if there is any misappropriation, stuff them into jail," the Barisan Nasional (BN) backbenchers deputy chief told Parliament.

Tan Sri Azman Mokhtar and Tan Sri Tony Fernandes at the MAS-AirAsia signing ceremony in August. — file pic

"How can Khazanah be fooled? Azman Mokhtar, how can he be so stupid, to be 'tuned' by Tony Fernandes. If I was in such a position, I would resign rather than troubling others.

"Maybe they are not stupid. Maybe they get huge profits by squeezing and grabbing money from the public," he said, referring to the AirAsia CEO's company Tune Air which now owns a fifth of MAS.

Sri Gading MP Mohamad Aziz also accused AirAsia of "clearly cheating the public and now trying to cheat MAS."

"If this kind of man (Fernandes) can control us, God forgive us," he said while debating Budget 2012.

Bung Mokhtar also said the government should "not be scared of Fernandes."

"Whatever he wants, we give. He wants to overcharge for excess baggage and suck the blood of poor villagers.

"Now I hear he has a plan in the future to take over all domestic flights and MAS will only have international flights. If we give this to him, the country will be in ruins. It will be the end of the world for us," he said.

Bung said if the government could not provide a satisfactory answer, it meant that "government officials colluded with AirAsia and has vested interests."

The MAS-AirAsia swap has come under fire from both sides of the political divide as well as employees of MAS who believe the deal will affect their careers.

The finance ministry said earlier this month that the deal is being investigated by Bursa Malaysia and the Securities Commission for insider trading despite the swap being agreed on three months ago.

MAS's poor financial performance of late had resulted in the share swap with AirAsia on August 9.

This allowed AirAsia boss Fernandes to sit on the MAS board, ostensibly to help turn the ailing airline around.

MAS had announced in August a net loss of RM527 million for the second quarter of 2011 due to higher fuel costs despite recording a better yield and a nine per cent growth in passenger revenue from the same period last year.

This brings total losses in the first half of the year to RM769 million even as the airline said that profit outlook for the second half of the year appears bleak.

Putrajaya insisted last month it had "no choice" but to implement the controversial share swap as "if (MAS) continues to make losses and the government has to inject funds, then there will be even more anger."

Critics have accused the budget carrier's boss of taking advantage of the loss-making national airline to fuel his personal ambitions, the latest being the acquisition of English Premier League club, Queens Park Rangers (QPR).

The national carrier will sponsor QPR's home jersey for the next two seasons, while AirAsia's logo will be emblazoned on the team's away and third kits in a "multi-million pound" deal.

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