

**Tony Fernandes hits back at Umno MPs**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 15 — Tan Sri Tony Fernandes lashed out today at Umno lawmakers for criticising him in the MAS-AirAsia share swap deal, asking them to scrutinise instead how much the new Low-Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) had cost the government.

He lamented the criticisms, made during debates in Parliament yesterday, were personal in nature, pointing to how one MP had accused him of raping "poor villagers".

"Villagers could never fly before. We have worked so hard to make flying affordable and 130 million people have flown due to us," the AirAsia CEO (picture) wrote on his Twitter account today.

"Why are these members of parliament not questioning the cost of airports and fighting for the people for lower taxes for the rakyat."

"Why has the PAC not looked into the airport cost of the new LCCT and why a third runway is needed," he added, using his Twitter handle @tonyfernandes.

When another Twitter user @gbeejipp asked if the construction of the new LCCT and the third runway had been his idea, Fernandes retorted: "We wanted the terminal to be built behind main terminal. And no third runway."

When called "arrogant" by Twitter user @firDYfire, Fernandes lashed out in his own defence, telling the user to "ask my 9000 staff if I'm arrogant."

"You haven't met me either," he added.

One user, in explaining criticisms against the share swap deal, expressed fear that with Fernandes' presence on the MAS board, AirAsia's services would suffer and model compromised.

"Why on earth would we do that? People have a choice. If too expensive they won't fly. Why do we want lower airport tax for you? To make it cheaper," Fernandes replied.

In Parliament yesterday, Umno lawmakers Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin and Mohamad Aziz accused Fernandes and Khazanah chief executive Tan Sri Azman Mokhtar of cheating the public in the share swap deal.

Kinabatangan MP Bung Mokhtar said Azman should 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.

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

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).

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