

BBC to apologise for airing paid-for Malaysia news
The Malaysian Insider
February 11 , 2012
By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 11 — The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has pledged to apologise for airing paid-for programmes that were favourable to some countries including Malaysia.

UK daily The Independent reported today the BBC will apologise to an estimated 74 million people around the world for a news-fixing scandal in which it aired as documentaries programmes that had been paid for in a deal with a London-based publicity firm.

According to The Independent, the global apology by BBC is expected to read: "A small number of programmes broadcast on BBC World News between February 2009 and July 2011 broke BBC rules aimed at protecting our editorial integrity.

"These rules ensure that programmes are free, and are seen to be free, from commercial or other outside pressures."

Making a direct reference to the FBC documentaries, it will say: "In the case of eight other programmes, all of which featured Malaysia, we found that the production company which made the programmes appeared to have a financial relationship with the Malaysian government.

"This meant there was a potential conflict of interest, though the BBC was not aware of it when the programmes were broadcast."

The apology will be broadcast worldwide on the BBC's World News channel to an estimated 295 million homes, 1.7 million hotel rooms, 81 cruise ships, 46 airlines and on 35 mobile phone platforms at four different times, staged in order to reach audiences in different time zones, the paper reported.

The BBC Trust's Editorial Standards Committee carried out an investigation into BBC World News in November and uncovered 15 breaches of editorial guidelines.

Eight of the breaches were in respect of FBC programmes made about Malaysia- due to an apparent "financial relationship" between the government and FBC Media, the TV production company.

The BBC was reported to have paid nominal fees of as little as £1 (RM5) for programmes made by FBC Media (UK), whose PR client list included Malaysia and other foreign governments.

The Independent pointed out that FBC Media made eight pieces for the BBC about Malaysia while failing to declare it was paid £17million by the Malaysian government for "global strategic communications" which included positive coverage of Malaysia's controversial palm oil industry.

The BBC also used FBC to make a documentary about the spring uprising in Egypt without

knowing the firm was paid to do PR work for the regime of former dictator Hosni Mubarak.

TV company FBC Media has been found to be at the centre of the Malaysia news-fixing scandal facing BBC and CNBC, and is facing collapse.

The London-based firm and its parent company FBC Group went into administration last year — a legal term that allows a company facing bankruptcy to carry on business — following reports it accepted £17million from Putrajaya to burnish the Najib administration's image on global broadcast networks.

FBC was set up in 1998 by award-winning US journalist Alan Friedman and other prominent media individuals who built a network of blue-chip clients that included the governments of Greece, Italy and Zambia, with contracts to promote tourism in Malaysia, Indonesia and Hungary.

FBC has been exposed to have also doubled up as a publicity firm for the Najib government and was paid millions of pounds to conduct a "Global Strategic Communications Campaign".

But Putrajaya has ended its RM96 million contract with FBC, which started in 2009, after it was revealed Malaysian government leaders regularly appeared in paid-for-TV programmes.

The Malaysian Insider has reported of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak contracting a series of public relations strategists, including APCO Worldwide, to polish his personal image and his government's locally and worldwide.

APCO's time in Malaysia was marked by controversy after the opposition alleged the public relations firm was linked to Israel.

The most recent hire are members of the team behind former British PM Tony Blair's "New Labour" campaign, who were reported to have started work to reinvent Najib as a moderate reformist.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/bbc-to-apologise-for-airing-paid-for-malaysia-news/>