

**Admit role in news-fixing scandal, PKR tells BN
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By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 27 — PKR today demanded the Barisan Nasional (BN) government come clean on its role in a news-fixing scandal involving the UK's FBC Media last year, saying the recent firing of a columnist by British daily The Guardian over his link to the now-defunct firm proved the administration's involvement.

PKR communications director Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad also played the BN administration for its apparent fixation on gaining international recognition through questionable means and with disregard for journalistic ethics, saying it showed the administration's obsession with "spin over substance".

"At the same time, it also shows that the current administration is preoccupied not with solving the country's problems but with gaining dubious validation from overseas to cover up its lack of domestic achievements," the Seri Setia assemblyman said in a statement here.

"If (Datuk Seri) Najib (Razak) is serious about his so-called reforms and the progressive image his consultants have so carefully cultivated for him abroad, then he ought to come clean to the Malaysian rakyat about his administration's role in the news-fixing scandal that has ironically tarnished the country's image," he added.

The Malaysian Insider reported earlier today that The Guardian has terminated writer Joshua Trevino's services as he had quoted Datuk Seri Najib Razak while freelancing for the British newspaper last year without disclosing multiple conflicts of interest.

Immediately prior to the stint, Trevino worked as a consultant for a company implicated in a news-fixing campaign financed by the Malaysian government and was also running a website that attacked Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and other opposition interests here.

The American commentator had also reported extensively in the past few years on Anwar's Sodomy II trial on his Malaysia Matters website, which is now defunct.

Trevino had also frequently criticised Anwar in his other columns in other publications such as the Huffington Post.

FBC Media, the company alleged to have been referred to by The Guardian, made eight programmes for the BBC about Malaysia while failing to declare it was paid £17 million (RM85 million) 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.

The BBC was forced to make a public apology over the matter.

FBC had also been exposed to have 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 last year ended its RM94 million contract with FBC, which started in 2007, after it was revealed Malaysian government leaders regularly appeared in paid-for-TV programmes.

Trevino was recently hired by The Guardian to be its conservative columnist in the United States. But his appointment had drawn a firestorm of protests from liberal activists after it emerged he had urged Israel to shoot at the humanitarian flotilla in 2011 that was seeking to break its naval blockade of Gaza.

When boats carrying unarmed civilian activists attempted in June 2011 to break the blockade of Gaza, Treviño tweeted out a message to the Israeli army: "Dear IDF: If you end up shooting any Americans on the new Gaza flotilla — well, most Americans are cool with that. Including me."

Trevino also reportedly called the flotilla a "Nazi convoy."

Nik Nazmi said today it was ironic that Umno and BN leaders often attack Anwar and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) here for being anti-Islamic and pro-Zionist but yet hire consultants known for their hardline Zionist views to burnish their credentials abroad.

"The hypocritical stance of portraying Anwar as anti-Israeli abroad while portraying him as an Israeli lackey back home exposes the hollow and desperate tactics of Umno-BN," he said.

The Malaysian Insider previously reported that Najib had contracted a series of public relations strategists, including APCO Worldwide, to polish his personal image and his government's locally and worldwide.

Late last year the government said image consultants FBC Media helped raise the standing of Malaysia as a tourism and investment destination during the RM94 million three-year deal that began in 2007.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz told Parliament that the London-based media company, which is facing bankruptcy, "supported the efforts of government leaders and ministers" to burnish the country's image overseas.

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