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NAME: ANWAR IBRAHIM

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HEADLINE: In Malaysia, Ex-Official Found Guilty; Anwar Sentenced to 6 Years After Bizarre Corruption Trial

DATELINE: KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, April 14 (Wednesday)

BODY:

Ousted Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was convicted of corruption and sentenced to six years in prison today.

High Court Judge Augustine Paul found Anwar guilty on all four corruption counts. The conviction and sentence bar Anwar from returning to politics for at least five years after his release.

Anwar called the verdict "an absolute disgrace" and accused Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of plotting against him.

"I have been dealt a judgment that stinks to high heaven," he said.

Anwar, 51, was sentenced to six years on each of the four charges, with the sentences to run concurrently, said one of his defense attorneys, Pawancheek Merican.

"It's not over yet," the attorney said. Anwar's defense team said they intended to file an appeal immediately.

Named finance minister in 1991 and deputy prime minister in 1993, Anwar was at one time the heir of the long-ruling Mahathir. But when Asia's financial crisis erupted in mid-1997, it pitched the two strong-willed leaders into conflict by fanning Anwar's ambitions and Mahathir's protective instincts. In September, Mahathir fired Anwar.

During Anwar's bizarre trial, which opened Nov. 2 and ran for 78 days, the judge listened to 23 prosecution witnesses and 22 from the defense. The state argued that Anwar was a corrupt adulterer. A mattress said to contain Anwar's bodily fluids was dragged into the courtroom, and witnesses testified that he had sex with women and men. His former driver said Anwar forced him to perform sexual acts.

The defense argued that Anwar was a devout Muslim, innocent of all charges and the victim of a political conspiracy to eliminate his challenge to Mahathir's 18-year leadership. Each of the four corruption charges carried a maximum of 14 years in prison and a \$ 5,000 fine.

Days after his firing on Sept. 2, Anwar launched a nationwide tour calling for Mahathir's resignation. From initial crowds of several hundred people in the back yard of his house, Anwar mobilized tens of thousands of activists within two weeks.

For the first time, citizens in the typically placid Southeast Asian nation gathered more than 30,000-strong at the capital's National Mosque on Sept. 20.

Police arrested Anwar that night, pummeled him until he nearly died, brought him to court 10 days later with a badly bruised eye and charged

him with corruption and illegal sex.

Anwar's conviction could make him a larger hero in Malaysia and a rallying point for the fragmented opposition. The main Islamic opposition party may portray Anwar's imprisonment as an example of how Muslim leaders are treated by Mahathir's government, observers said. Anwar is widely viewed as an Islamic scholar and enjoys support among younger Muslims.

Before the verdict, about 500 of Anwar's supporters gathered near the court and defied a police order to disperse. Two police water cannon trucks and about 50 riot police with helmets, shields and batons faced the crowd, which shouted "Reform!" and called for Mahathir to step down. They carried pictures of Anwar and a banner reading: "The People Judge the Nation."

"Disperse now or we will use force," a police officer with a megaphone warned the crowd. After the verdict was announced, police used a water cannon to douse about 200 protesters when they refused to leave.

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