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Anwar asked me to deny the sodomy allegation, says Azizan

Ruslaini Abbas; Carolyn Hong

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Azizan Abu Bakar, who testified yesterday about being sodomised by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, said today Anwar had called him in June this year to ask him to deny the sodomy allegation.

He said Anwar had told him the police would soon call him to give evidence about the book 50 Dalil Kenapa Anwar Ibrahim tidak boleh jadi PM (50 reasons why Anwar Ibrahim cannot become PM).

Azizan, who alleged the sodomy occurred when he was employed by Anwar as his wife's driver, said Anwar asked him to deny the sodomy and that he had made a sworn statement alleging the sodomy.

Azizan said he also told Anwar he did not know the author of the book and had not read it.

He said their meeting, which lasted five to 10 minutes, was arranged by Anwar's ADC ASP Zull Aznam Harun, who had called him to invite him to dinner. When he arrived at the quarters near Anwar's official residence, Zull Aznam said Anwar wanted to meet him and took him into a small room in the house.

Azizan disclosed this under examination-in-chief by senior deputy public prosecutor Datuk Abdul Gani Patail, amid strenuous objections from Anwar's lawyer Christopher Fernando.

The judge allowed the questions, accepting Abdul Gani's contention that the evidence was needed to rebut the defence case of conspiracy.

Under cross-examination, Azizan said his reason for putting down the sodomy allegation in a sworn statement was to "uphold the truth", although it was very shameful. He said he overcame his shame for the sake of his honour and religion.

Azizan said he had a cordial relationship with Anwar after 1992, when the sodomy allegedly occurred, until 1997 when he told Ummi Hafilda Ali about it.

Ummi is the sister-in-law of Shamsidar Taharin, for whom Azizan had worked as a driver. Shamsidar is married to Ummi's brother Mohamed Azmin Ali, who was Anwar's private secretary.

Azizan said he told Ummi about the sodomy when she contacted him to get information about Shamsidar, whom Ummi believed to be having an affair with Anwar.

Based on his information, Ummi wrote the sworn statement and he signed it. Azizan said he did not give details to Ummi, only the places. He said he could not remember the times and dates of the incidences, but only that they mainly took place between 7.30pm to 8.30pm.

(Ummi had also written about the alleged sodomy and her suspicions of Shamsidar in a letter to the Prime Minister).

Anwar is charged with trying to avoid criminal proceedings by directing former Special Branch director Datuk Mohd Said Awang and deputy Datuk Amir Junus to get Ummi and Azizan to retract the allegations.

Azizan gave his testimony in the same calm manner as yesterday, facing the judge all the time. Occasionally, he answered in bursts of words which required the interpreter to repeat slowly for the judge to note down.

Anwar also took notes. His wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and two daughters Nurul Izzah and Nurul Nuha listened intently, but displayed no emotion. The two girls hugged their father tightly before he left court after the day's hearing.

Azizan also told the court he and Ummi had sought legal advice from

lawyer Karpal Singh in August last year because they were followed by strangers after their letters were sent to the Prime Minister.

Azizan said he had received a call from an angry Anwar, asking him why he was involved in the sworn statement and Ummi's letter. He said Karpal told them to leave it to the Prime Minister to settle.

(Karpal has been subpoenaed by the prosecution and challenged this. His application is scheduled to be heard tomorrow).

Questioned by Fernando, Azizan said he was made a director in his friend's ailing company in 1997 to "turn it around" but did not have any functions and was not paid.

To another question, he said he met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad once on Aug 24 this year but had never met the PM's political secretary Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin or Special Functions Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Before Azizan took the stand this morning, Anwar's leading counsel Raja Aziz Addruse tried to lodge a protest about police searching the office of Pawancheek Merican, another member of the defence team, yesterday.

The police were investigating a report lodged by DPP Shamsul Sulaiman on missing notes of proceedings. The judge rejected the protest saying the police should be left to carry out their investigations.

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