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Azizan contradicts himself (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Azizan Abu Bakar who alleges that he had been sodomised by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, today caused confusion when he told the court that he would not have visited Anwar from 1992 to 1997 if the latter had sodomised him.

Questioned by Anwar's lawyer Christopher Fernando, he agreed to counsel's suggestion that he (Azizan) continued to visit the house between 1992 and 1997 because he was not sodomised.

Gasps swept through the public gallery at this as Azizan had all along stuck to his sworn statement that he had been sodomised several times in 1992 while he was employed as the driver of Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

His reply today appeared to contradict his testimony given both under examination-in-chief and cross-examination since last Wednesday.

He gave the reply when Fernando put several questions to him as a follow-up to his earlier testimony that he continued to visit Anwar's family from 1992, when the alleged sodomy occurred, to 1997 when he exposed it.

Fernando: I put it to you that the accused did not do anything to you, that is why you continued to go to his house between 1992 and 1997, otherwise you would have kept far away from him.

Azizan: Yes.

The court interpreter repeated the question in Bahasa Malaysia and Azizan said he did not understand what counsel meant by "do anything".

Fernando: I put it to you that the accused did not sodomise you, that's why you continued to go to his house between 1992 and 1997?

Azizan: Yes.

The second reply caused another stir and several people seated in the family section of the public gallery shook hands with one another.

Azizan continued to look as impassive as he always had since he took the stand. He gave the replies in his usual expressionless manner, keeping his face turned to the judge at all times.

This apparent contradiction is expected to be addressed by the prosecution in their re-examination of the witness, which will follow the cross-examination.

Azizan's sodomy allegations are a central part of the case against Anwar who is charged with trying to avoid criminal proceedings by getting them retracted. He allegedly did this through former Special Branch director Datuk Mohd Said Awang and deputy Datuk Amir Junus. (Charges on P4)

Azizan made his allegations in a sworn statement which was sent to the Prime Minister last year. The allegations were also contained in a letter written by Ummi Hafilda Ali, the sister of Anwar's former private secretary Mohamed Azmin Ali.

Azizan also told the court that a lawyer named Sukhdev Singh and two persons, Rahim King (Abdul Rahim Dahalan) and Ma'amin Latib, whom he described as "Anwar's people", had tried from June to August this year to get him to retract the allegations.

He said he was frightened because they called him several times and on Aug 10, he signed a statement denying the sodomy.

Azizan said he lodged a police report on Sept 16. Asked why it took him 36 days to do so, he said he did it after "Anwar was no longer in power".

Laughter from the public gallery broke out and Anwar lifted his fist

silently, in the manner popular with the reformasi movement.

Azizan added to his reply, that he gained confidence from his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who told him that further investigations would be carried out into the matter.

(Azizan testified last week that he met the Prime Minister on Aug 24, 1998.)

Questioned by Fernando, Azizan said he thought people would believe his story if he went public through Ummi because "she seems like a good person and people would believe her."

Azizan said he did not go to "people with clout" because he did not think he would be believed. He also said he did not have faith in the police and did not have many friends to whom he could disclose the alleged sodomy.

Meanwhile, as Azizan's testimony filtered out, the crowd outside the courthouse gates grew rapidly. The people raised cheers and clapped each time a defence counsel appeared when court broke for lunch.

Many rushed to shake Fernando's hand, taking photographs of him even after he had entered his car.

It was more chaotic after hearing ended when Anwar's wife Dr Wan Azizah came outside to read out a Press statement. The people surged forward, forcing the police to usher Dr Wan Azizah back behind the gates.

The crowd continued to press forward, shouting "Hidup Azizah".

* MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 4 & 6

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