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Defence seeks to impeach witness as cross-examination continues (HL)

Ruslaini Abbas; Carolyn Hong

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's lawyers today continued to cross-examine Azizan Abu Bakar, a prosecution witness who alleged that Anwar had sodomised him, but informed the court they intended to apply to impeach him.

Counsel Gurbachan Singh said since they intended to institute impeachment proceedings, he asked the judge to allow them to interview two persons whom Azizan had described as "Anwar's people", who allegedly harassed him.

Azizan testified extensively today about Rahim King (Abdul Rahim Dahalan) and Ma'amin Latib, who had taken him to meet lawyer Sukhdev Singh several times.

He said he was asked to sign a statutory declaration on Aug 10, 1998 denying he had signed a sworn statement on Aug 5, 1997 which carried the sodomy allegation.

He said he signed the statutory declaration because he was frightened but added that its contents were not true.

Gurbachan said because of this, the defence wanted to interview Rahim and Ma'amin. Senior deputy public prosecutor Datuk Abdul Gani Patail objected, saying the defence could not do this at this stage.

The judge also expressed doubt if it could be done. "They will make it all available when they offer the witnesses to you, or else you have to survive on your own ... unless you can show me some law."

The defence later said it would put the application for impeachment on hold for the moment.

Azizan is the 12th prosecution witness in the trial of Anwar who 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 him and Ummi Hafilda Ali to retract their allegations.

Ummi, the sister of Anwar's former private secretary Mohamed Azmin Ali, also wrote about the sodomy allegation and adultery in a letter. Azizan's sworn statement and Ummi's letter were sent to the Prime Minister.

Azizan told the court he met Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad from 9.10pm to 10.10pm at his residence on Aug 24, 1998, after being told by the Special Branch that the Prime Minister wanted to know the truth.

Azizan said he told Dr Mahathir his sworn statement with the sodomy allegation was true and the latter said the police would investigate the matter in depth.

He added that the Prime Minister advised him to be careful and to contact the nearest police station if his safety was threatened.

Azizan said he was frightened that Anwar might learn about this meeting but said he did not lodge a report about his fear because Anwar was still in power.

Under cross-examination by Gurbachan, Azizan also said his pregnant wife and unborn child died in an "ordinary road accident". He said she was not murdered and he did not suggest that Anwar was in any way involved in her death.

When the judge asked the relevance of this, Gurbachan said it was part of the defence case to show a conspiracy against Anwar.

He said the book 50 Dalil Kenapa Anwar Ibrahim tidak boleh jadi PM (50 Reasons why Anwar cannot become PM) insinuated that Anwar had a hand in the accident.

Azizan said he had not read the book nor did he have anything to do with its writing. He said at that time, he did not know the writer or publisher.

However, he agreed he told Ma'amin that he felt "slandered" by the publication and distribution of the book, because there was an allegation that he (Azizan) was involved in its writing.

Outside the courthouse, a big crowd showed up again, as large as the one which gathered yesterday after Azizan gave testimony which appeared to contradict his earlier evidence.

The queue for public seats was very long, and a member of the public who was the second last to get in said he had been in line since 3am. According to him, the first person in the queue arrived at 1am.

In contrast to yesterday's noise, there were no cheers for the defence lawyers today but the people swarmed around to listen as the lawyers spoke to reporters.

* MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 4 AND 5

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