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Ex-assemblyman's wife gives evidence in defamation case

PENANG, Thurs. - The wife of former State Assemblyman for Prai Datuk V. Muthusamy said today her husband was not chosen to contest his State seat in the 1995 general election following a New Straits Times report about him seven years ago.

Datin Valli Muthusamy said her husband's candidacy was rejected by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Only seven months before the report appeared, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu had informed my husband that he would be appointed a State Executive Councillor," she told the High Court.

Valli, who was then the national Wanita MIC chairman, said this during examination by her husband's counsel C.V. Prabhakaran.

She was testifying in a defamation suit by Muthusamy, 57, a lawyer, against NST reporter Joceline Tan Poh Choo, its group editor and New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd.

In his statement of claim, Muthusamy said the news report entitled "Lawyer and Trader Conspired To Cheat Driver", on Sept 12, 1991, the defendants had falsely and maliciously printed and published the article which was understood to mean he was a cheat.

The article by Tan was a report of a court case in which Muthusamy was named a second defendant by a driver, G. Paramasevam. However, on Dec 29, 1993, Paramasevam withdrew his suit and was ordered by the court to pay RM10,000 in costs to Muthusamy.

Meanwhile, in the defendants' amended statement of defence, they said the article was a fair and accurate report of the court proceedings and they were entitled to the absolute privilege under the Defamation Act. They also denied attempting to destroy Muthusamy professionally and as a politician by publishing his picture.

Valli said she was very upset and depressed upon reading the article and had asked her husband to contact Tan for an apology and correction.

"My husband spoke to Tan over the telephone and we expected a correction but to no avail.

"My husband and I were in Kuala Lumpur then to attend the MIC annual meeting and many people, including Datuk Samy Vellu, enquired about the report," she said, adding that they were also subjected to constant harassment from telephone callers after they returned to Penang.

She said the report had badly affected Muthusamy's business and it also brought his political career to an end.

Earlier, another witness, lawyer Yeap Ghim Guan said he was 90 per cent sure that Tan was not in court to cover the proceedings.

Asked by defence counsel J.A. Yeoh if he was familiar with the faces of court reporters, Yeap said he was.

Another witness, R. Raman, a former Special Branch officer, said he was directed by his superiors to interview Muthusamy about one month after the article appeared.

Justice Datuk Wan Adnan Mohamad adjourned hearing to Sept 28.

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