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Anwar's RM100m libel suit: Sun files defence

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd today filed its statement of defence against the RM100 million libel suit brought by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Its statement was filed through the law firm of V. Siva and Partners at the High Court (civil division) registry at Wisma Denmark in Jalan Ampang.

Anwar filed the suit on Jan 26 against Sun Media for publishing an article in the tabloid The Sun on Sept 23 last year which highlighted the Press conference given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and carried the headline Anwar's behaviour despicable: PM.

The report in question was published in Page 2.

In its statement of defence, Sun Media admitted that it published the words that Anwar found to be contentious on the ground that it was "an occasion of qualified privilege."

Moreover, the words were a fair and accurate report or summary of the Prime Minister's Press conference, it said.

Sun Media said it published the Prime Minister's statement because it was the legal, moral and /or social duty of the defendant to publish the Prime Minister's words in its newspapers.

"Readers had a legitimate interest to receive the information thus conveyed," it said.

On Anwar's contention that the words complained of were published "falsely and maliciously," Sun Media stated the complaint was "otiose".

On the Prime Minister's purpose at the Press conference, Sun Media stated that it was to explain the reasons behind Anwar's dismissal and why protests against the dismissal were misconceived, and why the plaintiff had been arrested.

"It was the Prime Minister's public duty to give this explanation," Sun Media said. "The public had a corresponding interest to hear their Prime Minister's explanation."

Likewise, it was the duty of the media to convey that explanation, it said.

The transcript of the Prime Minister's Press conference and questions raised by journalists were also included in the 88-page statement of defence.

Sun Media contended that Anwar's suit was "wholly misconceived" and asked the court to dismiss it with costs.

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