

04 MAR 1999

Court-Anwar (Azmin)

I TRUST MY WIFE IMPLICITLY, SAYS AZMIN

KUALA LUMPUR, March 4 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's former private secretary, Mohamed Azmin Ali, told the High Court here today that he trusted his wife, alleged to have had an affair with Anwar.

"I trust my wife implicitly," he said when testifying for the defence at Anwar's corruption trial which entered its 65th day today.

Mohamed Azmin said that he also did not believe that Anwar would have been involved in an affair with his wife, Shamsidar Taharin.

"I have known Anwar for over 10 years and I know he would not have done such a thing," he said.

Anwar, 51, faces four charges of corrupt practice with using his position to interfere in police investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

The former deputy prime minister and the former finance minister is charged under Section 2 (1) of the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance No 22 of 1970 which carries the maximum jail term of 14 years or a maximum fine of RM20,000 or both on conviction.

The hearing is presided by Justice Datuk S. Augustine Paul.

Mohamed Azmin, 34, the 14th defence witness, said that his attitude towards Anwar changed after he was aware of the allegations.

"What I mean is that I became closer to him to defend him against injustices even though it involved my own sister," said Mohamed Azmin, whose sister, Ummi Hafilda, had sent a letter "Perihal Salah Laku Timbalan Perdana Menteri" (The Matter Of The Misconduct Of The Deputy Prime Minister) to the prime minister.

Mohamed Azmin, now unemployed, said that he came to know of the allegations from his good friend then, Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein Onn, now deputy minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

He said that he was told about the matter on Aug 10, 1997 at the home of Hishammuddin who also told him of the letter which he received from International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

Ummi Hafilda had sent the letter dated Aug 5, 1997 to the prime minister together with a sworn statement by Azizan Abu Bakar, the former driver of Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, alleging that Anwar had sodomised him.

Mohamed Azmin, who first served under Anwar in 1987 as special officer to the education minister then, said that Hishammuddin appeared angry and said he was prepared to resign from his post in the party when informing him of the matter.

At this stage, Justice Augustine Paul said that the second part of Mohamed Azmin's evidence regarding Hishammuddin's alleged preparedness to resign was inadmissible.

The judge also disallowed any evidence relating to what was stated to him by Hishammuddin as it was not relevant to the case.

Earlier, Sulaiman Abdullah, one of Anwar's nine defence counsel, submitted that Mohamed Azmin's evidence was relevant to show that Anwar did not need to make any attempts to obtain retraction letters from Ummi Hafilda and Azizan as nobody who had known him would believe the allegations.

Meanwhile, Senior Deputy Public Prosecutor Datuk Abdul Gani Patail told the court that it was not relevant and there was no law allowing such an evidence to be admitted.

Mohamed Azmin, who became Anwar's private secretary since 1993, said that when he returned home, he informed the matter to his wife and Shamsidar showed him a similar letter said to be by Hishammuddin, placed in the letter box of their house.

Justice Augustine Paul repeatedly reminded Christopher Fernando, who was questioning Mohamed Azmin on behalf of the defence team, not to ask questions relating to the truth or falsehood of allegations contained in the letter.

Fernando said that they were relevant as it involved Mohamed Azmin's wife and he needed to explain his response to the allegations but the judge said it was not necessary although he sympathised with Mohamed Azmin.

Earlier, Mohamed Azmin said that he was aware of another letter said to have been written by Ummi Hafilda and sent to the prime minister in August 1997 after Anwar had handed over the letter to him to be destroyed soon after Anwar returned after a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said that the letter contained Ummi Hafilda's criticisms of him for not helping her obtain business opportunities apart from criticisms of Anwar but it was brief and less caustic than the letter on the allegations of Anwar's misconduct.

Mohamed Azmin told the court that he knew former Special Branch director Datuk Mohamed Said Awang and his deputy then, Datuk Amir Junus.

He said that he met Mohamed Said on Aug 11, 1997 before the police officer met Anwar at 8.45am at the Prime Minister's Department.

At the meeting, Mohamed Said had asked him whether Ummi Hafilda was his sister and he told him that she was.

At this juncture, Justice Augustine Paul asked whether the question had been posed to Mohamed Said and Fernando explained that the defence did not know of the meeting until Mohamed Azmin was offered to the defence by the prosecution.

Another of Anwar's defence counsel, Gurbachan Singh, submitted that the defence did not know of the matter but was prepared to recall Mohamed Said for him to explain and to this the judge said that the issue did not arise until he had been recalled.

Mohamed Azmin said that after the meeting, he felt concerned over what was stated by Mohamed Said and had called for a meeting of all his family members that day.

When Fernando asked whether Mohamed Said had asked him to obtain a letter of retraction from Ummi Hafilda, Abdul Gani objected and the judge ticked off Fernando based on the court's earlier ruling that the issue did not arise for as long as Mohamed Said was not recalled.

To another question by Fernando, Mohamed Azmin said that at the family meeting, he told his brothers and sisters that he had been asked by Mohamed Said to get a letter of retraction from Ummi Hafilda but Justice Augustine Paul stressed that the same ruling applied to the question.

Mohamed Azmin said that he did not agree with Mohamed Said's suggestion but "Ummi and I are not on talking terms" and he discussed the matter with Anwar in mid-August 1997.

"Anwar did not take this seriously...in fact he asked me blankly why Ummi called him a sodomist," he said, and to this Abdul Gani said that the question did not arise when Anwar gave his evidence and that would make it hearsay.

"An accused is an accused. He was not offered by the prosecution. Why was this question not put to him," Abdul Gani said, to which Fernando replied that they could not remember every detail and came to know about this only after they interviewed Mohamed Azmin.

Justice Augustine Paul said that he would make a ruling on it at a

later stage.

Mohamed Azmin, who was asked regarding the allegations made by his sister in court that he had bribed their father to side him and to disown her, he said: "She is a compulsive liar".

Justice Augustine Paul: She said you are a great liar, now you said she is a compulsive liar.

Mohamed Azmin: She is a greater liar.

The judge also asked whether the issue was relevant because the charges had been amended but Fernando submitted that it was essential to show the credibility of Ummi Hafilda who had made the allegations.

Gurbachan Singh said that it was also to show Mohamed Azmin's credibility.

Mohamed Azmin told the court that Ummi Hadilda's allegations were not true as it was a big lie as the house was built in 1993.

"How could I anticipate my father to take this action five years later because she was disowned on Sept 1, 1998 at 5.20pm, one day before Mahathir disowned Anwar," he said.

At this point, the judge reminded the defence to advise its witnesses not to make any remarks and just to answer according to the law.

Another defence witness called today was the principal assistant secretary of the Management Division of Parliament, Zamani Sulaiman, responsible for the hansard.

Zamani produced the hansard dated April 9, 1998 containing a statement by then Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Nazri Aziz in the parliamentary sitting that the prime minister had stated that the allegations of sexual misconduct against Anwar were baseless according to police investigations when replying to Member of Parliament for Jelutong Karpal Singh.

A journalist with The Sun, Rusdi Mustapha, confirmed that he wrote a report on the news conference given by Anwar regarding the allegations of his sexual misconduct.

Hearing continues at 9am tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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