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PM's application to be heard on July 2

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The High Court will hear on July 2 an application by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to strike out a defamation suit filed against him by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Judge Datuk Dr Kamalanathan Ratnam fixed it to be heard before a senior assistant registrar along with another application by Dr Mahathir to amend his statement of defence.

Kamalanathan said he would only hear the matter if both parties consented to waive the hearing before the SAR. He said if the SAR directed the application to be heard by him, he would then hear it but parties would have to appear before the SAR first.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir's counsel Datuk Mohd Adnan Shuaib said he had written to Anwar's lawyer Karpal Singh to inform him they wanted the application to be heard before the judge.

However, Karpal said the application should rightly be heard before the SAR, adding they did not wish to exhaust their opportunity to appeal (to the judge).

"If the SAR prefers it to be heard by the judge we will do accordingly," he said.

In his suit filed on Jan 25, Anwar claimed, among others, that Dr Mahathir had on Sept 22 last year "falsely and maliciously" spoken to local and foreign reporters accusing him of committing immoral acts.

In his statement of defence filed on March 22, Dr Mahathir contended that he had spoken the words in his capacity as prime minister on an occasion of qualified privilege.

The Prime Minister, in his affidavit-in-support filed for the application to strike out the suit, said the statement he made on Anwar on Sept 22 was already public knowledge.

Anwar, in the affidavit-in-reply, said Dr Mahathir's application was defective and said his claim was with merit and based on serious issues to be tried by the court.

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