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PM: Statement was public knowledge

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the statement he made on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at a Press conference on Sept 22 last year was already public knowledge at that time.

The Prime Minister said this in an affidavit in support of his application to strike out a RM100 million libel suit filed against him by Anwar.

Dr Mahathir said two days earlier, Anwar's one-time speechwriter Dr Munawar Ahmad Anees and Anwar's adopted brother Sukma Darmawan Saasmitaat Madja had pleaded guilty in the Sessions Court for committing an act of gross indecency under section 377D of the Penal Code.

(Munawar and Sukma had admitted on Sept 19 to committing the offence by allowing Anwar to sodomise them).

He said the charge referred to Anwar as a participant in commission of the offence and that both Munawar and Sukma proceeded to plead guilty and admitted that the facts were accurate and true.

"Munawar was accordingly convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment for the said offence. I am advised and verily believe that the conviction of Munawar still stands," he said.

On Sukma, he said: "A written confession signed by Sukma and taken by a magistrate was tendered in court as part of the plea in mitigation."

Sukma was also convicted and sentenced to six months jail.

Dr Mahathir said these matters were conducted in open court and were subsequently widely and prominently reported in all the daily newspapers the following day.

"The events occurred some two clear days prior to the statement I made at the Press conference," he said.

In his application filed on Monday, Dr Mahathir had sought to strike out the suit on grounds that:

- \* it discloses no reasonable cause of action against the defendant; and/or
- \* it is scandalous, frivolous or vexatious; and/or
- \* it is otherwise an abuse of the process of the court.

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 immoral acts.

Anwar claimed Dr Mahathir had spoken the words knowing that and/or with the intention that it would be published by the local and international print and electronic media, including The Sun, Newsweek and CNN International, and republished elsewhere.

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.

He denied that the words were defamatory or bore the meanings claimed by Anwar, contending that they "are true in substance and facts".

(END)