

02 JUL 1999

Court-Anwar (Mahathir)

SENIOR ASSISTANT REGISTRAR DISQUALIFIES HERSELF FROM HEARING SUIT

KUALA LUMPUR, July 2 (Bernama) -- The High Court senior assistant registrar today disqualified herself from hearing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's application to strike out the RM100 million defamation suit brought against him by his former deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Norliza Othman announced the decision in chambers giving the ground that she had recorded a confession from Anwar's former speechwriter, Dr Ahmad Munawar Anees, who was jailed six months by the Sessions Court on Sept 19 last year for allowing Anwar to sodomise him.

She then sent the case back to High Court judge Datuk Dr R.K. Nathan for mention on Tuesday.

She was to have heard Dr Mahathir's applications to strike out the suit and also to amend his statement of defence today.

Anwar filed his suit on Jan 25, claiming that the prime minister had falsely and maliciously spoken to local and foreign reporters in a news conference held at the Prime Minister's Department, accusing him of committing immoral acts.

Anwar claimed that Dr Mahathir had uttered the words knowing that they would be published locally and internationally.

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

He said the words were published in the course of discussion of government and political matters which concerned Anwar in relation to his suitability for the offices he held and after due inquiry and investigation into the matters.

Anwar, in his reply, said the defence of qualified privilege was not open to Dr Mahathir because he had acted maliciously and in bad faith by uttering and causing the offending words to be published and republished.

Besides damages, interest and costs, Anwar is seeking an injunction restraining Dr Mahathir from further uttering such words against him.

Anwar, who was sacked from the Cabinet on Sept 2 last year, is serving a six-year jail sentence after being found guilty of corrupt practice by abusing his position to interfere in police investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

He is currently on trial on a charge of sodomy.

-- BERNAMA

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