

24 JUN 1999

Court-Anwar (Contempt)

STOP CONTEMPT OF COURT ATTEMPTS, ORDERS JUDGE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 24 (Bernama) -- The judge in the sodomy trial of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today ordered the defence to stop attempts to cite anyone for contempt of court during the course of the trial.

Justice Datuk Arifin Jaka said he took a firm stand that anyone could comment on any subject provided it did not touch on any aspect of the proceedings being conducted in his court.

If anybody feels slighted or injured by such comments, he was entitled to take the appropriate action, said Arifin at the High Court here.

"But I hope there's no further attempt to cite anybody for contempt during this proceeding as such applications will amount to a tactic to delay the progress of this proceeding," he said.

The judge was commenting on a statement in the court by Anwar's counsel, Karpal Singh, that former Lord President Tun Hamid Omar ought to be cited for contempt of court over his remarks published in today's newspapers.

Arifin said he took note of Karpal's concern over the matter and advised him to take the appropriate action.

Hamid was quoted in today's newspapers as saying that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad should not be held in contempt if his comments on Anwar were not related to the ongoing court case against the former deputy prime minister.

Hamid said this when asked whether Dr Mahathir's statement on Anwar during the Umno general assembly was in contempt of court because on Monday, Anwar's defence team accused the prime minister of trying to influence the court case by his statements on Anwar.

Karpal, who had referred to the newspaper reports as the basis of his complaint today, said such comments had placed Anwar in anxiety when "he should be left in peace to face the trial".

"The point is this, what would any reasonable citizen think when such comments are made, one by the prime minister and next by the former lord president. Next maybe by the generals of the armed forces, I do not know," he said.

Karpal said the defence would not hesitate to cite Hamid for contempt for his "irresponsible comments" and the court should put a stop to it.

Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah who led the prosecution team said the defence should file a proper application if it felt Hamid was in contempt of court.

He said pending such application, it was premature for Karpal to raise it in this proceeding.

"It is also premature for Your Lordship to make any comment or direction at this junction in the absence of any formal application," he said.

After Arifin made the order, Karpal said the defence did not mean to interfere with the court proceeding but the complaint was made in the interest of Anwar and his adopted brother Sukma Darmawan Sasmitaat Madja who is jointly tried.

Mohtar said having read Hamid's remarks, he was of the opinion that the former lord president's comments were fair.

Arifin then ordered the trial to proceed.

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