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Anwar-Sukma trial: Reporters asked about 1997 news items

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Several local reporters testified in Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy trial today regarding their stories in 1997 relating to denials on sex allegation against the sacked Deputy Prime Minister.

The denials were reportedly made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor.

E. Sivabalan from Bernama said he wrote a news story on Aug 24, 1997 entitled "No truth in letter alleging Anwar's involvement in sex scandal, says PM."

He said it was stated in the unpublished story that the Prime Minister had said there was an attempt to tarnish Anwar's image through allegations that he was involved a sex scandal.

Sivabalan said the Prime Minister refuted the allegations, saying that there was no truth in it and the case was considered closed after police investigations.

The witness was called by the defence in the case in which Anwar and his adopted brother businessman Sukma Darmawan Sasmitaat Madja are charged with sodomising former driver Azizan Abu Bakar at the Tivoli Villas apartment in Bangsar between January and March 1993.

Sukma is also facing a second charge of abetting Anwar in sodomising Azizan who is the former driver of Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, at the same time and place.

Questioned by leading counsel Christopher Fernando, Sivabalan said it was stated in his story that the Prime Minister said only a stupid person would believe the allegations against Anwar.

Sivabalan said the Prime Minister spoke about the allegations at a Press conference during which he said the whole issue was politically motivated.

The next journalist who took the stand was A. Kathiresan from The New Straits Times who referred to his story entitled "IGP: Allegations against Anwar baseless" which appeared on Sept 3, 1997.

Kathiresan said the then IGP (Abdul Rahim) spoke at a Press conference in Penang in conjunction with his visit to the island.

Among other things, Abdul Rahim said the allegations against Anwar were false and a former police officer was allegedly involved in the matter, Kathiresan said.

Asked by Fernando, the journalist denied misquoting Abdul Rahim in his story.

Two journalists from Utusan Melayu Malaysia Berhad, Mariam Mat Zin and Yahaya Ahmad, were asked about their stories entitled Fitnahkan Anwar bermotif politik - PM (Slander on Anwar motivated by politics) and Penyebar khabar angin patut ditembak (Rumour mongers should be shot) which appeared in Utusan Malaysia and Minggu Malaysia on Aug 25 and 28, 1997, respectively.

Both of them read their stories in court after being asked to do so by Fernando.

Yahaya agreed with Fernando (who referred to excerpts from his story) that the Prime Minister had said that those who slander "should be shot".

He said the Prime Minister told the Press conference that such people did not care about the country, but themselves.

Yahaya said the Prime Minister also denied that Anwar had resigned as

the Finance Minister and he (the Prime Minister) had taken over the Finance Ministry.

To another question, Yahaya said the Prime Minister said this in the context of the drop in share prices on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

Earlier, Bandaraya Development Bhd property officer Tan Seng Kooi said he noticed "extensive" renovation work being done in an apartment at Tivoli Villas belonging to Sukma.

Tan said the renovation work was confined to the master bathroom and there was no carpet or bed when he visited the apartment in January 1993.

To a question, Tan said nobody was staying in the apartment then.

Hearing continues.