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Ex-Pas sec-gen sues TV3 for RM60m

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Former Pas secretary-general Halim Arshat has filed a RM60 million suit against TV3 and two others for broadcasting alleged defamatory news regarding its tabloid Harakah in its Buletin Utama programme.

In his statement of claim, Halim said the words used in the news at about 8pm on Aug 18, 1997, in their natural and ordinary meaning meant that:

* the bi-weekly tabloid had accused Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of coming out of Islam (murtad);

* Harakah and Pas had become a tool to divide Muslims in the country;

* Harakah and Pas attempted to bring down the PM's image and dignity;

* Harakah and Pas had published the false news that was defamatory of the PM; and

* Harakah and Pas were vengeful and jealous of the PM and the country.

He said the words referred or were understood to refer to him because he was at the material time Pas secretary-general and also the permit holder for Harakah.

As a result, Halim said he suffered acute embarrassment, his credibility, character and reputation were tarnished, and he was humiliated.

In his suit filed on June 1, 1998, Halim named Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad, TV3 operations director Yunus Said and Buletin Utama producer Rozaireen Ibrahim as defendants. He is claiming RM20 million in damages from each of them.

In their defence, the defendants deny they had falsely and maliciously published the news. They also deny the news referred to Halim and claim he has no locus standi to bring the action.

They said the matter was of public interest as it was regarding a statement by a Menteri Besar following the apostate (murtad) issue published in Harakah.

They are also relying on a defence of fair comment and qualified privilege.

Counsel Mohamed Hanipa Maidin acted for Halim while P.H. Looi appeared for the defendants before judge Datuk R.K. Nathan. The case will be re-mentioned on April 26.

(END)