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Fair report, says former TV3 director

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - A former operations director with Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad told the High Court today that he considered a TV3 news broadcast of Harakah allegedly accusing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of coming out of Islam (murtad) as fair reporting and not defamatory.

TV3's former operations director Md Yunus Mohd Said said: "... What was set out in the report were matters of general public interest particularly on the important issues concerning religion and politics."

He said the news bulletin in TV3's Bulletin Utama aired at 8pm on Aug 18, 1997, simply reported what a particular Minister had said during an interview.

"The Minister did say during the interview that he, as the head of the Pusat Islam, would be making a proposal to the Home Affairs (Ministry) to review the permit granted to Pas for the publication of Harakah."

Md Yunus was testifying at the trial of former Pas secretary-general Halim Arshat's RM60 million defamation suit against TV3, himself and Buletin Utama producer Rozaireen Ibrahim over the news bulletin.

Halim, 58, claimed that the words used in the news bulletin 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.

He claimed that the words in their natural and ordinary meaning meant, among others, that Harakah and Pas had published the false news that was defamatory of the Prime Minister and that Harakah and Pas were vengeful and jealous of the Prime Minister and the country.

Halim said as a result he suffered embarrassment and his credibility, character and reputation were tarnished.

He is claiming RM20 million in damages from each of the three defendants.

Later, replying to questions by counsel Mohamad Hanipa Maidin, for Halim, Md Yunus disagreed that TV3 was malicious in broadcasting the bulletin as it involved an issue of public interest.

In their defence, the defendants deny the words were defamatory in their natural and ordinary meaning and that it did not refer to Halim.

They are also relying on the defences of justification and qualified privilege.

Hearing continues on Dec 1.

(END)