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Former Pas sec-gen testifies despite stroke disability

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Former Pas secretary-general Halim Arshat testified in the High Court today in his RM60 million defamation suit against Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad and two others despite having a severe speech and language impairment as a result of a stroke.

His counsel Mohamad Hanipa Maidin informed the court of Halim's condition and referred to a medical report dated Oct 16 which stated that the impairment caused Halim difficulties in understanding what others said and in conveying information to others.

Halim, 58, suffered the stroke in February 1998.

Judge Datuk Dr R.K. Nathan allowed Halim's wife, Siti Hawa, to sit beside Halim to assist him in understanding the questions.

Counsel for both parties also had to repeat the questions slowly and rephrase certain questions to enable him to understand.

At times, Halim himself asked for the questions to be repeated.

Replying to questions by Mohamad Hanipa, Halim said TV3's broadcast of a Buletin Utama programme at 8pm on Aug 18, 1997, which stated that PAS's bi-weekly tabloid Harakah had accused Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of coming out of Islam (murtad) was defamatory.

He said Harakah never published such news, adding that the news bulletin was false.

Answering questions in-between long pauses, Halim said the words used referred or were understood to refer to him because he was then Pas secretary-general and also the permit holder for Harakah.

Later, Harakah managing director Datuk Hishamuddin Yahya said his assessment of Bulletin Utama's news reports about Pas was that they were always "one sided".

"In many instances, it's confusing especially for people who do not know of Pas' struggles. The news in Bulletin Utama is untrue and malicious..."

When asked why he had not demanded a clarification from TV3, he said Pas knew that such demands would not be entertained.

In the suit against TV3, its operations director Yunus Said and Buletin Utama producer Rozaireen Ibrahim, Halim claimed that the words used in the news bulletin in their natural and ordinary meaning meant, among others, that Harakah and Pas had published the false news that was defamatory of the PM and that Harakah and Pas were vengeful and jealous of the PM and the country.

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

He is claiming RM20 million in damages from each defendant.

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