

19/10/2000

Harakah editor: TV3 news was malicious

Sujatani Poosparajah

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A Harakah editor told the High Court today that Sistem Televisyen Malaysia's false news broadcast of the tabloid allegedly accusing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of coming out of Islam (murtad) was malicious as it was aired during prime time.

Harakah editor Zulkifli Sulung said the news bulletin could bring about public hatred towards the tabloid as it had accused it (Harakah) of publishing an article which accused the leader of the country as murtad.

He said the news bulletin in TV3's Bulletin Utama aired at 8pm on Aug 18, 1997 could have been watched by the entire public.

Zulkifli said that the particular Harakah article published on Aug 11, 1997 was merely a report on a general statement made by a former mufti of Selangor to everyone including government leaders regarding the issue of murtad.

Zulkifli said that in his opinion, the statement was more of an advice to all Muslims to be careful in giving or making statements regarding Islamic laws.

He also said that the mufti never issued any fatwa that the Prime Minister had come out of Islam.

Zulkifli agreed that the issue arose after the Prime Minister criticised the Selangor Religious Department in relation to two Muslim beauty pageant contestants.

He agreed that the issue was of public interest but disagreed with a suggestion that TV3 had merely broadcast something which the public was already aware of.

Zulkifli was testifying at the hearing of former Pas secretary-general Halim Arshat's RM60 million defamation suit against TV3, its then operations director Yunus Said and Buletin Utama producer Rozaireen Ibrahim over the news bulletin.

Halim, 58, claimed the words in the news bulletin referred or were understood to refer to him because he was at the material time Pas secretrary-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.

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

In their defence, the defendants deny they had falsely and maliciously published the news and are relying on a defence of fair comment and qualified privilege.

Counsel Mohamad Hanipa Maidin closed the plaintiff's case today and judge Datuk Dr R.K. Nathan fixed Nov 11 for the defence's case to begin.

(END)