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My right to tell on senator, says ex-Usahanita chief

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed: A businesswoman considers it her right to inform the Umno president about the conduct of party member Senator Datuk Nor Azah Awin.

Her letter to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Nor Azah's conduct, character and integrity as a bumiputra politician and entrepreneur was fair comment, said Nor Azizah Borhan, in her defence against a RM50 million libel suit by the senator.

"I have a legitimate right as an Umno member to inform Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the prime minister, who is also the president of Umno, about the bad character of the plaintiff in order to preserve and safeguard the image and reputation of the party," she said.

Nor Azizah, former president of Persatuan Usahawan Wanita Bumiputra Malaysia (Usahanita), also claimed freedom of speech and expression under Article 10(1)(a) of the Federal Constitution.

The words in the letter,

dated Dec 14, 1999, were true in substance and fact, she added.

She denied circulating copies of the letter to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi or other politicians.

Nor Azah, 48, filed the suit on April 2 claiming to be injured in her character, credit and reputation.

Nor Azah, who is the secretary-general of the Malaysian Senators' Club, alleged that Nor Azizah had forwarded the letter to other political figures as well.

She said Nor Azizah had maliciously alleged she was guilty of fraud and had business ties with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's siblings, indirectly implying she does not support the government.

Besides damages, Nor Azah is seeking an injunction to restrain Nor Azizah from further circulating the letter.

Justice Datuk Abdul Hamid Said will hear the application on June 13.

Gopi Seshadari represented Nor Azah while Ramesh N. F? Chandran acted for Nor Azizah during the case management of the matter in chambers today.