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Anwar's appeal to be heard on March 24

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Court of Appeal has fixed March 24 to hear Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's appeal against his conviction and nine-year jail sentence for allegedly sodomising his wife's former driver Azizan Abu Bakar.

The sentence which was passed on Aug 8, 2000, by High Court judge Datuk Arifin Jaka was ordered to commence after the six-year jail sentence he is currently serving for corrupt practices.

Anwar was found guilty and sentenced to jail by Arifin for sodomising Azizan at the Tivoli Villas apartment in Bangsar between January and March 1993.

In his petition of appeal filed on July 25, 2001, Anwar listed 24 grounds, among others, that Arifin had erred in law and in fact in calling Anwar to enter his defence at the end of the prosecution's case when the prosecution had failed to adduce primary evidence required to support the sodomy charge.

Anwar said the judge also erred in failing to impeach Azizan when he (Azizan) was not able to explain or reconcile the glaring and obvious contradictions in his evidence.

Anwar contended that the decision of the judge, his untenable rulings and his findings were clearly against the weight of the evidence.

He said Arifin erred in holding that he (Anwar) had not established his alibi despite the cogent evidence adduced to cover the entire relevant period.

He further said the judge also erred when he ruled that the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) was not a relevant witness.

On the sentence, Anwar contended that it was grossly excessive and unconscionable in all the circumstances.

Anwar, who was sacked from his Government and party posts in September 1998, was charged with 10 offences - five sodomy and five corruption.

In April 1999, he was convicted on four charges of corruption and sentenced to six years' jail.

The Federal Court has fixed March 18 to hear Anwar's application to review its decision in dismissing his appeal against his conviction and sentence of six years' jail on four counts of corrupt practice.