

Anwar kicks off defence; on witness stand tomorrow
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Fresh from his trip to Manila, Anwar Ibrahim will be back in court tomorrow to take the witness stand for the first time at his sodomy trial.

The hearing is expected to last until Aug 26 in which, besides Anwar, a long list of other witnesses will be called.

This is the most crucial stage for the former deputy prime minister as he has to convince the court, as well as the court of public opinion, as to his guilt or innocence in the second sodomy charge he faces in less than 15 years.

Anwar had maintained from the outset that the charge and the recently released sex tape were part of a 'political conspiracy', trumped up by those in power.

He claimed that both were aimed at undermining his task of mounting a strong challenge against Umno and dislodge the ruling BN coalition from power.

The second sodomy allegation surfaced just before Anwar returned to Parliament by winning the Permatang Pauh by-election in August 2008, a seat vacated by his wife and PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

Decision on application to quiz PM, Rosmah

However, before the trial proper commences, Kuala Lumpur High Court judge Mohamad Zabidin Mohd Diah will deliver his decision on whether to allow Anwar's application to interview 15 witnesses, including Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, his wife Rosmah Mansor and former inspector-general of police Musa Hassan.

Zabidin (left) had heard submissions from both the defence and prosecution over this matter on Wednesday.

Najib and Rosmah had allegedly met with complainant Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan at their official residence when he was the deputy prime minister, two days before the alleged sodomy incident.

Solicitor-general II Mohd Yusof Zainal Abiden said Najib, Rosmah and Musa were willing to be interviewed, but only if subpoenaed.

He also told the court that the trio were not related to the charge at hand where the alleged incident took place at the Desa Damansara condominium.

Lead counsel Karpal Singh had in his submission sounded a warning to the court that the need to subpoena witnesses to be interviewed would set an unusual precedent as this goes against normal jurisprudence practise and what was agreed upon before Anwar's defence was called.

To make matters worse for Anwar, he was not given copies of these witnesses' statements which were recorded by the police as the Federal Court had earlier overturned the High Court decision to make such documents available.

Initially the defence lawyers were also denied the witnesses list, but they finally got it after Anwar's defence was called.

Five witnesses already interviewed

The defence team had so far interviewed five witnesses on the witnesses list who may be called in Anwar's defence.

They included Mumtaz Jaafar, former national athlete and close associate of Rosmah, Hospital Pusrawi doctor Dr Mohamad Osman Abdul Hamid, the physician who first examined Saiful.

Mumtaz had allegedly met Saiful after the sodomy incident.

Others whom the defence had interviewed were former special officer to the deputy prime minister Khairil Annas Jusoh, who had worked for Najib and had met with Saiful earlier; a Hospital Kuala Lumpur medical officer Dr Anantha Raj Daniel; and Saiful's sister Saidati.

Besides Najib, Rosmah and Musa, the defence also wanted to interview former Malacca police chief Mohd Rodwan Mohd Yusof, condo owner Hasanuddin Abd Hamid and his wife, Noor Sham Abd Hamid, their maids Suliati and Fitria Dipan.

Rodwan also played a pivotal role in the first sodomy case.

Others are alibi witnesses who were in the condo include former PKR supreme council member Nik Mahmood Nik Hassan, former Bursa Malaysia chief operating officer Omar Malek Ali Merican, Deutsche Bank chief executive officer Raymond Yeoh, Anwar's former bodyguards, Mokhtar Mustafa and Abdullah Sani Said, and Anwar's former driver, Mohd Khoharullah Abdul Majid.

In addition, Anwar's expert witnesses - forensic pathologists Dr David Wells and DNA specialist Dr Brian McDonald - are also expected to take the stand.

Saiful's dad complains to Suhakam

In a related development, the complainant's father Azlan Mohd Lazim had on Friday submitted a letter dated Aug 2 to the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) hoping for its intervention to ensure the trial is not postponed upon its resumption on Monday.

He said the trial had entered its third year since Anwar was first charged at the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court.

Azlan said his son's right as a victim had not been observed as the trial had been dragging on for too long.

"I hope that Suhakam would monitor the situation as any further postponement would hold grave implications," he said.

Meanwhile, Anwar's defence lawyer Karpal Singh ticked off those calling for outside intervention, arguing that this could amount to "contempt of court".

"Anwar's trial should be allowed to proceed without any interference from any quarter," he stressed.

Anwar was called to enter his defence on May 16 when justice Zabidin, in an elaborate judgment which took him one hour and 40 minutes to read, found the prosecution had proven a prima facie case against the opposition leader.