

## **Judge loses cool in Anwar vs Utusan suit**

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**By Nigel Aw**

Kuala Lumpur High Court judge VT Singam, presiding over opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's defamation suit against Utusan Malaysia, today lost his cool after the daily's lead counsel Firoz Hussein repeatedly asked similar questions on case facts in his cross-examination.

"Are you destroying your case or are you helping your case, I don't know," he snapped.

Earlier, Firoz had queried Anwar on what he did not say during his interview with international broadcaster BBC.

"I put it to you that while you say you were committed to the sanctity of marriage you never said that homosexuality was a crime" and "I put it to you that you did not say in your interview that liwat (sodomy) in Islam is punishable by lashing and stoning" were among the lines of questions posed by Firoz.

Anwar repeatedly explained that he had not touched on any of those matters as the BBC interviewer had not asked him about it.

An annoyed Singam later said: "There is already an agreed statement on all this, why am I sitting here? I am not a recording machine. Do this in your submission."

Today was the first day of trial on the defamation suit against Utusan Malaysia for all allegedly alluding Anwar to being a proponent of homosexuality in a conservative Muslim-majority Muslim country.

The daily had quoted axed former Selangor PAS commissioner Hasan Ali calling on Malaysians to reject Anwar due to immoral activities based on the opposition leader's interview with BBC in which Hasan said Anwar called for a review of laws relating to homosexuality so as not to be punitive in nature.

Anwar promises proof of Umno-Utusan link

Firoz had also raised dissatisfaction that Anwar had in his witness statement accused Umno of pulling the strings in Utusan Malaysia and queried if he had any such evidence.

"If I were to buy documents from the Companies Commission, would it say that Utusan Malaysia's chairperson is appointed by the Umno president?... I put it that is mere speculation," he said.

While conceding that it was not stated in such documents, Anwar, who is also PKR supremo, insisted that this was the norm from his experience when he was still Umno deputy president in 1998. However, Firoz pointed out that 14 years had passed.

He then applied to the court for three paragraphs in the witness statement to be expunged, citing that Umno was a third party and thus not relevant to the case.

At this, Anwar's lead counsel N Surendran argued that the link was important to the plaintiff's case as it would prove the motive behind Utusan Malaysia's malice against the opposition leader.

Judge Singam said the decision on whether to allow the witness statement to be expunged or not will be decided later as Anwar had promised to furnish the court with documentary proof that Umno had a hand in the workings of Utusan Malaysia.

The next hearing is fixed for Aug 13.

Anwar had filed the suit on Jan 20, claiming that the defendants had published a front-page article which he claimed distorted his statements on laws against homosexuality made during an interview with the BBC.

He is claiming RM150 million in aggravated and exemplary damages and other relief deemed fit by the court.

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