

Anwar's lawyer is charged with sedition

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PKR vice-president N Surendran today claimed trial to a sedition charge filed against him in a sessions court in Kuala Lumpur.

If found guilty, Surendran will face a maximum three-year jail term or a maximum fine of RM5,000, or both.

The Padang Serai MP is charged with sedition for saying, in a press statement titled 'Court of Appeal written judgment in Fitnah II is flawed, defensive and insupportable' on April 14, 2014, that the Anwar Ibrahim Sodomy II charge is false.

DPP Syed Faisal Syed Amir, who represented the prosecution, asked for bail be set at RM10,000.

However, lawyers M Puravalen and Latheefa Koya (on the right) told the court that Surendran is a MP and a lawyer, so a nominal sum should be set.

Among those present were PKR vice-president and Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar, former Selangor exco Dr Xavier Jeyakumar and party communications director Fahmi Fadzil.

Surendran is the second vice-president from PKR charged under the controversial and draconian Sedition Act, which Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has said his government intended to repeal.

Batu MP and PKR vice-president Tian Chua has also faced a similar charge.

Sessions judge Zainol Rashid Hussain set bail at RM5,000 with one surety and fixed Sept 18 for case management.

'Najib's pledge hollow rhetoric'

In an immediate reaction, Human Rights Watch's Phil Robertson (right) criticised the government for hauling Surendran to court.

"The government's decision to charge Surendran with sedition today is yet another blatant example of a draconian law being used to violate freedom of expression and silence critics.

"This is part of a clearly emerging Malaysian government campaign to systematically pursue its political opponents using trumped-up charges under the Sedition Act," Robertson said.

He added that by engaging in legal harassment and persecution of opponents using a law that is a relic of colonial authoritarianism, Najib has demonstrated that he has no abiding commitment to either political moderation or human rights.

"His prior pledges to amend the Sedition Act sadly stand revealed as hollow rhetoric designed to deceive both Malaysians and the international community," Robertson added.

Surendran, when met outside court, described the action as malicious prosecution by Umno following police reports lodged against him.

He said what the charge meant was that any judgment by a court of law could not be questioned by anyone, including lawyers.

"This is a dangerous charge, and shocking, for I have been charged with sedition for criticising a judgment of the court.

"What it means is that any law professor who criticises a judgment is deemed to have committed sedition. This charge will not deter me in any way and I will continue the fight for justice," he said.

Sedition law targets opposition

Surendran said the criticism he made was, basically, on the grounds Anwar would make in his appeal at the Federal Court on October 28 and 29.

"The appeal was fixed last Friday and it is coming up in October," he said, adding that for this, more than 100 police reports were lodged against him.

Surendran also criticised the Attorney-General's Chambers for instituting the charge against him.

"It is ridiculous and embarrassing for the chamber and also damages the country's image.

"The PM has promised in 2012 to repeal the Sedition Act, but more and more people are charged under it and this is used to stifle opposition politicians.

"I will not be deterred and I will continue to represent Anwar in the appeal," Surendran added.