

**Malaysia on trial, Anwar says as sex trial resumes**  
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Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who returns to court Monday to face sodomy charges, said Malaysia's reputation is on trial in a case aimed at destroying his political career.

Anwar, a former deputy premier who was sacked and jailed on separate sex and corruption counts a decade ago, said Malaysian justice had deteriorated under Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who came to power a year ago.

"It is not Anwar's case. It is the institution of governance - the police, the judiciary and certain media - which have all got worse under Prime Minister Najib Razak. They are the real ones on trial," Anwar told AFP.

Anwar said he would not be cowed by the fact he could again end up behind bars if convicted of the charges that carry a penalty of 20 years imprisonment.

"I am committed to political and economic reforms. There is no turning back," he said.

"Of course I am a political threat. They have been trying for 12 years to kill my political career. I leave it to my supporters and Allah to believe in me."

Anwar, a 62-year-old father of six, is accused of having illicit sexual relations with a young man who worked in his office. Sodomy remains a crime in Malaysia, a conservative Muslim-majority nation.

The trial opened briefly in February with explicit evidence from his accuser, 24-year-old Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, but has been suspended since then as the defence pursued a number of unsuccessful legal manoeuvres.

They were knocked back in attempts to have the presiding judge disqualified, complaining he had refused to rein in biased media coverage, and also failed to win access to key prosecution evidence such as video footage and medical tests.

Anwar last week lost his final bid to strike out the sodomy charges, as the Federal Court rejected an appeal and paved the way for his trial to resume at the High Court on Monday.

'We intend to grill this witness'

His counsel Sankara Nair said the prosecution's refusal to release information such as its witness list and key documents on forensic and DNA evidence was problematic.

"Anwar is put in a very severely disadvantaged position. The defence faces an uphill task as vital documents in relation to Anwar's defence have not been given to us by the prosecution," he said.

Human Rights Watch has urged Malaysia to drop the charges against Anwar, condemning the case as a "charade of justice" and saying his lawyers had been blocked from preparing a thorough defence.

Sankara said the defence team would cross-examine Mohamad Saiful (right) when the hearing opens Monday.

"We intend to grill this witness," Nair said. "The court has set four days for this hearing." Hearing dates have been set until August but Sankara said he did not know when the trial would end.

Anwar's earlier sexual misconduct conviction was quashed in 2004 and he was released from jail. After a period of recuperation he reinvented himself as the leader of an opposition alliance.

Against all expectations, it made huge strides in 2008 elections, depriving the ruling coalition of its crucial two-thirds majority and redrawing Malaysia's political landscape.

After suffering its worst polls results in half a century, the shell-shocked Barisan Nasional coalition ousted the serving prime minister and drafted in Najib, who has unveiled reforms aimed at winning back support.

- AFP

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