

Blogger may call Mahathir as witness
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Blogger Ahirudin Attan, who is being sued by a newspaper for defamation, today said he may call former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad as a witness in his defence.

The government-linked New Straits Times Press (NSTP) on January filed controversial legal suits against Ahirudin Attan and another blogger, Jeff Ooi, over items published on their sites last year.

Ahirudin said Mahathir, as well as current prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, were integral to the case as they were mentioned in the postings, which criticised the newspaper and the government.

"If the bridge comes, I supposed I'll cross it. So if I have to call, I will call (Mahathir). They are all involved in my postings," Ahirudin told AFP.

Ahirudin did not elaborate further, saying he could be cited for contempt of court.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court today allowed Ahirudin to drop an application to strike out the NSTP's law suit, a move his lawyer Edmund Bon said was made after the group in February broadened the suit to include more articles.

"We are exploring the possibility of filing a new application," Bon told reporters.

The High Court on June 28 is also scheduled to hear an application by the NSTP for an injunction aimed at stopping Ahirudin, and removing the postings from his website, Bon said.

The NSTP has already won an injunction against Ooi to stop him from publishing articles or posting comments related to the unprecedented lawsuit.

National bloggers' association

Malaysian bloggers and media watchdogs have criticised the defamation lawsuit against Ahirudin, who writes the "Rocky's Bru" blog, and Ooi, who blogs "Screenshots."

They say the legal action will stifle free expression in Malaysia where the media is already tightly controlled.

Ahirudin said he had plans to set up a national bloggers' association.

"It's inspired by this law suit. We will promote blogging ... as well as protect bloggers," he said.

Abdullah has defended the NSTP's suit, saying the Internet is not exempt from defamation laws.