

Ex-Indonesian president, former US top judge back Anwar
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Two more prominent individuals have voiced their support for opposition stalwart Anwar Ibrahim, who has been charged with sodomy.
MCPX

Former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid (right) and former US Supreme Court judge Sandra Day O'Connor and said the recent developments in Malaysia were reminiscent of the 1998 campaign.

In a column for the Financial Times yesterday, the duo said: "The power to prosecute is one of the most awesome powers of the state. Without proper checks and balances it can easily be abused by those in power to humiliate and discredit innocent people."

"Even when the injustice is corrected, its victims are often left with their reputations permanently damaged.

"In Malaysia, the power to prosecute is being used to try to discredit Mr Anwar, the remarkable leader of the opposition, victim of a similar attack 10 years ago."

If this effort succeeded, Abdurrahman and O' Connor (left) said it would be a tragedy for Anwar personally, the people of Malaysia and the world.

Yesterday, the PKR leader was charged in the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court for having carnal intercourse against the order of nature.

After pleading innocent, the former deputy prime minister was released with a personal bond of RM20,000.

The charge, preferred following a complaint by Anwar's former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, carries a punishment of up to 20 years' imprisonment and caning if found guilty.

Integrity of the judicial system

On Tuesday, the opposition leader accused Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi of orchestrating a sham trial in a bid to cling on to power. The latter has denied this.

Anwar claimed that the charge was baseless and called it an attempt by his political rivals to prevent the opposition alliance Pakatan Rakyat from coming into power.

Meanwhile, Abdurrahman and O' Connor said on the brink of Anwar's political comeback in the Permatang Pauh by-election, his enemies have fought back with new sodomy charges.

"We find it impossible to believe these charges. We know Anwar as a man of integrity and we appreciate the way he has spoken on behalf of freedom, democracy and human rights.

"The charges are inconsistent with everything we know about his character," they argued.

The Malaysian authorities, the columnists said, need to recognise that there is no way that continued pursuit of these charges can be viewed as credible, given the history of prosecutorial abuse and manipulation of evidence in the earlier proceeding against Anwar.

"His political future should be decided at the polls, not through some suspect prosecutorial proceeding.

"We are deeply concerned that the safety, freedom and reputation of an important leader in the Muslim world are at risk.

"So, too, is the integrity of Malaysia's judicial system and along with it the credibility of the government in general. The future of Malaysia as an example of success for the developing world and for the entire Muslim world may be at stake."

Abdurrahman and O' Connor expressed hope that Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi - who "showed wisdom" earlier in facilitating Anwar's release from prison - will manage to drop the charges and in so doing serve the interests of justice for the people of Malaysia.

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