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## Businessman 'offered girls to Anwar for sex'

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's former premier Mahathir Mohamad detailed in his memoirs how in 1998 he interviewed four girls who had allegedly been taken by a businessman to offer sex to his then deputy Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the girls were persuaded to do so by an Indian man whom they called Nalla - possibly Datuk S. Nallakuruppan, who was Mr Anwar's tennis buddy but who has since fallen out with him.

The girls were taken separately to a house in the posh Kenny Hills neighbourhood.

"There they met a person they recognised as the deputy prime minister. They were asked to undress with the purpose of having sex," Tun Dr Mahathir wrote.

"Two of them said they refused but the other two consented. They were willing to talk to the police and to me but were adamant that they should not appear in court to give evidence," he said.

He also wrote that by then, he had known of Mr Anwar's alleged homosexuality. He had received a letter in 1997 from a woman called Ummi Hafida Ali, who gave specific details about the allegations of sodomy. Ms Ummi is the sister of Mr Anwar's close aide Azmin Ali.

But four years prior to this, then police chief Haniff Omar had already informed him of allegations linking Mr Anwar to homosexual activities.

Dr Mahathir said he felt he had to do something, and called a meeting of Umno leaders to brief them. He said he decided to remove Mr Anwar, but denied that he did so because he was afraid that his deputy would unseat him in the party elections that year.

"Even now it is difficult to explain convincingly that I was not afraid of this happening," he said, adding that he was confident of his popularity in Umno.

He said that when Mr Anwar was asked to give an explanation to the top Umno leaders, he did not refer to the homosexuality at all. He only spoke about the affairs with women, and said he had done nothing unusual as everyone had done such things.

Mr Anwar was charged in court that year, and jailed for six years for corruption in 1999. He was also jailed for sodomy, but the Federal Court overturned the conviction in 2004.

He is now the opposition leader in Parliament, and is facing a second trial after being charged with sodomising a male aide, Mr Saiful Bukhari Azlan. The trial is ongoing.

Mr Anwar told reporters after the hearing yesterday that Dr Mahathir's book was aimed at covering up the shortcomings of his administration and ensuring the political survival of his son Mukhriz.

He was quoted by the Malaysiakini website as saying that he was not surprised by the wild allegations against him, and was confident that the people would know the truth.

"(There are) certainly lies in the book... I would not be surprised if some Umno leaders go (so far as) to verify such wild claims," he said.

"However, we have a record of the supreme council meeting. As far as I remember, I did not admit to any such charge or claim."

CAROLYN HONG