

After Sodomy II, Umno papers accuse Anwar of supporting gay rights
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 15 — Within days of being acquitted of sodomising his former aide, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has now been accused of being a gay rights proponent, with Umno-owned papers claiming he said so during a recent BBC interview.

Anwar was recently acquitted of a charge of sodomising former male aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, with the High Court ruling that the prosecution had not done enough to prove Anwar had committed sodomy against Saiful.

Umno's Utusan Malaysia carried a front page story today "Anwar ulas isu gay" (Anwar discusses gay rights), while Berita Harian's title on the same story read "Tindakan Anwar sokong homosexual dikecam" (Anwar's support for homosexuals condemned by many).

Utusan's weekend news edition, Minggu Malaysia quoted the Opposition leader as saying during the BBC interview that laws on gay rights in Malaysia were considered "archaic" and "not relevant."

A BBC reporter had asked Anwar whether he was prepared to push for the idea of anti-discrimination as far as gay rights were concerned, to which he had allegedly said "we will have to review some of our archaic laws."

"We Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia generally believe and are committed to support the sanctity of marriage between men and women, but we should not be seen to be punitive and consider the archaic law as relevant," Anwar told BBC.

But additional excerpts of what the PKR de facto leader had said were evidently left out by both Utusan and Berita Harian.

Anwar had also said Pakatan Rakyat (PR) was of the view that "we do not promote homosexuality within the public domain, and we do not need to make apologies for that."

The Utusan article pointed out how Anwar's acquittal was well-received by a pro-gay rights group in the Philippines, called the Progressive Organisation of Gay Filipinos (ProGay), who had also called for laws against sodomy to be scrapped.

Berita Minggu, the weekend edition of Berita Harian gave ample space for critics to attack Anwar for his remarks during the interview, with Perak mufti Tan Sri Harussani Zakaria leading the fray.

Harussani was quoted by Berita Minggu as saying that Muslims were forbidden to come up with any statement seen to be supporting any same sex relationship because it could jeopardise one's faith.

"We cannot support or condone same sex relationships as it is the same as making incest halal. This can lead to apostasy.

"Muslims have to oppose any same sex relationships no matter if it involves men or women...do not abandon religion just to shore up support," he said, in reference to Anwar's BBC interview.

The Umno daily also quoted former PKR lawmaker Wee Choo Keong daring Anwar to make pro-gay rights laws a part of PR's election manifesto.

"As far as I know, homosexuality is a serious offence in Islamic syariah laws and sensitivities of Muslims have to be looked at. In this matter, Anwar should know more than me," said the Wangsa Maju MP.

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