

Anwar demands RM50m from Utusan over BBC report
The Malaysian Insider
January 17 , 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 17 – Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is demanding RM50 million in damages from Utusan Malaysia for allegedly tarnishing his reputation in an article accusing him of being a gay rights proponent.

In a letter of demand issued today by Edwin Lim Suren & Soh Advocates & Solicitors to the Umno-owned daily's editor and managing editor, Anwar (picture) also demanded the newspaper retract the article, publish an apology to him on its front page and refrain from printing similarly defamatory articles in the future.

The firm offered Utusan Malaysia a 48-hour deadline to respond, failing which it said legal action would be taken.

"The Umno-linked Utusan Malaysia newspaper has consistently published false, mischievous and scurrilous reports against the political opposition.

"Indeed, politically motivated and dishonest media reporting has become the norm among many mainstream media organisations such as Utusan Malaysia.

"This dismal state of affairs has been created, fostered and encouraged by the Barisan Nasional (BN) government," lawyer and PKR vice-president N. Surendran said in a press statement.

On Sunday, just days after Anwar was acquitted of sodomy, Utusan Malaysia front-paged a story titled "Anwar ulas isu gay" (Anwar discusses gay rights), claiming the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) de facto leader had told a BBC interview that laws on homosexuality in Malaysia were considered "archaic" and "not relevant".

In the said interview, the BBC reporter had reportedly 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 had told BBC.

According to Anwar's letter of demand, Utusan Malaysia's article on the issue had inspired former PAS leader Datuk Dr Hasan Ali to comment on the issue. The latter's comments were subsequently published in two articles in Utusan Malaysia today, titled: "Tolak Anwar – Hasan" (Reject Anwar – Hasan) and "Parasit ancam Pas, Anwar mesti ditolak" (Parasites threatening Pas, Anwar must be rejected).

In the articles, Hasan had reportedly referred to the interview when slamming Anwar for allegedly calling for homosexuality to be made legal in the country.

"At no point did Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim state that 'homosexuality should be legalised', or utter any words whatsoever to that effect.

"These allegations, and the article taken as a whole, are completely false, malicious and defamatory of our clients.

"Further, these allegations are calculated to injure our client's credit and reputation as a public figure, and bring him into public scandal, odium and contempt," the letter of demand said.

The Malaysian Insider

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