

Anwar: Utusan takes orders from 'President of Umno'
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By Lisa J. Ariffin

KUALA LUMPUR, July 18 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today it was “public knowledge” Utusan Malaysia was Umno-owned and that it took orders from the party’s president.

Anwar was testifying today in his defamation suit against Utusan Malaysia, which had in January accused the opposition leader of being a proponent of gay rights, claiming he had said as such during a BBC interview early this year.

The opposition leader made this statement despite agreeing with defence lawyer Datuk Firoz Hussein that the local newspaper was managed by public-listed Utusan Melayu (Malaysia) Bhd.

“I know for a fact that Utusan Malaysia receives instructions from Umno. I was deputy prime minister. I used to sit in their meetings and therefore, I have evidence,” he said.

“When there is a decision to appoint or to remove the editor-in-chief, the president will give orders,” he added.

Asked if he had any current evidence of Utusan receiving orders from Umno since leaving the government in 1998, Anwar answered: “Yes, if I can get hold of it in the next sitting.”

The PKR de facto leader then added, “I don’t remember the name of the person who sits on the board (selected by Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak), but I will give later”.

Anwar agreed that in other countries, local newspapers may choose to support political parties of their choice, but pointed out Utusan had slandered him for the past 14 years.

“They have every right to do so, but do not slander. By all means support, but don’t slander,” he said.

Utusan had previously quoted Anwar as saying during the BBC interview that laws on gay rights in Malaysia were considered “archaic” and “not relevant” when asked whether he was prepared to push for the idea of anti-discrimination as far as gay rights were concerned.

Anwar agreed today in court that homosexuals should be discriminated against to protect the sanctity of marriage, but pointed out that archaic laws should be reviewed to prevent innocent people from being punished.

Earlier this year, Anwar was 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.

The hearing adjourns on August 13.

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