

Umno owns 49.77pc stake in Utusan, court told
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By Ida Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 13 — Malay daily Utusan Malaysia — which had run several controversial reports accusing Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim of being a gay rights proponent in Muslim-dominant Malaysia — is majority owned and controlled by Umno, which had abused its position to gain political mileage, the High Court heard today.

Anwar, the de facto leader of the opposition PKR, told the court Umno was using its majority stake to turn the broadsheet into its propaganda tool for political motives. The Malay party is the mainstay of the 13-member Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

The 65-year-old was testifying in his defamation suit against the newspaper, which had in January accused him of being a gay rights proponent, alleging he had admitted as much in a TV interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) early this year.

Anwar (picture) said “49.77 per cent. What is to be disputed?”, referring to Umno’s stake in the paper according to the list of shareholders in Utusan’s 2010 annual report.

He was responding to Utusan’s defence lawyer Datuk Firoz Hussein’s question during cross-examination on whether he agreed that “more than half” of the list of top 30 shareholders are “clearly not Umno members”.

Anwar agreed that there were other shareholders in the company besides Umno.

Asked if he agreed that Umno does not own more than 50 per cent of the shares, Anwar disagreed, saying that the other nominees are also linked to the ruling party.

Later, when quizzed by his own counsel N. Surendran, Anwar said that shareholders with more than 30 per cent of shares will “control” a company.

Anwar said Utusan’s board of directors was “clear proof that Umno controls fully”, earlier on claiming that the board members are “all from Umno”.

He was also asked how he had obtained knowledge that Datuk Tengku Sarifuddin Tengku Ahmad, who is on the board of directors, is a representative of the prime minister.

Anwar said Tengku Sarifuddin is the prime minister’s media officer who was “entrusted with important matters”, saying that he had signed as a witness to the APCO agreement.

“He sits on the board of directors even though not holding any position,” he told the court.

Anwar had in January filed the defamation suit, seeking RM50 million in damages and an injunction to stop Utusan and its editor-in-chief from repeating similar statements.

At the hearing on July 18, Anwar had told the court that it was “public knowledge” that Utusan Malaysia was Umno-owned and that it took orders from the party’s president.

Anwar also agreed then 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.

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 two articles published in Utusan, former PAS leader Datuk Dr Hasan Ali had reportedly referred to the BBC interview when slamming Anwar for allegedly calling for homosexuality to be made legal in the country.

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