

Utusan news editor 'not sure' of truth of report on Anwar
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By Ida Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 — Utusan Malaysia's chief news editor told the High Court today that he was "not sure" if a news report about Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was true or not, saying that the Malay daily had only published it based on an unedited "full transcript" of former PAS member Dr Hasan Ali's statement.

Zulkiflee Bakar said this when testifying in Opposition Leader Anwar's defamation suit against the newspaper that 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's lawyer N. Surendran had asked Zulkiflee whether he was "not sure if the article about the plaintiff (Anwar) was true or not."

He replied "not sure".

Surendran asked if Zulkiflee agreed that "maybe the content was true, maybe (it was) not true".

Zulkiflee said it was both.

He later told defence lawyer Datuk Firoz Hussein the news report was based on Hasan's statement, saying that Hasan should know whether it was true or not.

Zulkiflee said the newspaper published the report without any editing.

He also said the news report was a "full transcript" and "we will not carry out amendments (pindaan) to the sentences."

He also disagreed with Surendran that the article was published with the intention to damage Anwar's political reputation.

Zulfilee also said the newspaper reports on the issues of the day.

On August 13, the Malay daily's editor-in-chief Datuk Abdul Aziz Ishak told the court that the newspaper did not give a balanced coverage to the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition and federal opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

Aziz had said: "I disagree that Utusan only publishes negative things about Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. We publish many positive things about Anwar."

Surendran had asked Aziz if he agreed that Utusan had never published anything positive on Anwar "in the 14 years since the plaintiff (Anwar) left government."

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 statements about him being a gay rights proponent.

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

High Court judge V.T. Singham will hear additional clarifications and is expected to deliver his decision on December 27.

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