

Anwar's right to appoint counsel of his choice, say lawyers

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Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is exercising his right to counsel of his choice in appointing retired judge Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram to lead his defence team in his sodomy appeal, said lawyers, including deputy public prosecutor Tan Sri Shafee Abdullah.

They said that it was his right as provided under the Federal Constitution to appoint Sri Ram, who is now a practising lawyer, as his counsel.

"We cannot stop him (Anwar). That is his right. However, it is up to Sri Ram whether or not to accept the brief," Shafee told reporters after court proceedings at the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya today.

Lawyer N.Surendran, who is part of Anwar's legal team, said there should not be any dispute over Anwar engaging Sri Ram as counsel as the opposition leader was exercising his right, as a defendant, to his choice of legal representation.

"The Federal Court has decided retired judges can appear for clients in a court," he said.

"Absolutely nothing wrong for Sri Ram to appear as counsel for Anwar. It is his right to accept any brief as a lawyer."

Surendran said Sri Ram had acted according to the best traditions of the bar and in Anwar's case, took the brief even though it was on short notice.

Meanwhile, Anwar did not address the issue directly but said that his priority now was for a good defence for his case.

"He has done excellent work as my counsel," he said after the proceedings ended today.

"I have lost Karpal (Singh) and (Datuk) Sulaiman Abdullah is not well. Sri Ram gave an impressive performance yesterday."

Karpal, who had previously defended Anwar during the trial in the High Court and the hearing in the Court of Appeal, died in a road accident on April 17, while Sulaiman, who was initially slated to head Anwar's defence team, could not make it as he was unwell.

"The priority now is my good defence in light of all this harassment and controversy," Anwar said.

Sri Ram's appointment as Anwar's defence lawyer had caused a stir among a group of lawyers and individuals who are questioning a Malaysian Bar resolution which prohibited ex-judges from appearing as counsel.

The group, who included lawyer Datuk Zulkifli Noordin, wants the Bar Council to take a stand on the position of the retired Sri Ram who is leading Anwar's defence team in the sodomy appeal.

They said a resolution was passed by the Malaysian Bar in its annual general meeting last March in response to Sri Ram, a former Federal Court judge, from acting in a constitutional case.

"Yesterday and suddenly out of the blue, we hear that Sri Ram has agreed to act for Anwar and the Malaysian Bar president maintains a deafening silence," the statement said.

It said the Bar's stand could only be described as hypocritical in the face of the actions of Sri Ram and that the Bar failed to comply with their own resolution. – October 29, 2014.

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