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Malaysia: Charges against Anwar politically motivated

Sodomy charges against Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim may be an attempt to stop him from running for election to parliament, Amnesty International said today.

“Ten years ago the government used a similar charge of sodomy against Anwar Ibrahim and kept him in jail for six years, the conviction was ultimately overturned,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific director. “In 1998, Amnesty International considered Anwar Ibrahim a prisoner of conscience. Today, there are again indications that the government is not playing by the rules in this case.”

A male aide, Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, had filed a complaint stating that Anwar Ibrahim had forcibly sodomized him. On 28 July the medical examination report of Azlan by a doctor at a private hospital was leaked to the press. The report indicated that he had not been sodomized. However the doctor advised him to go to a government hospital for a second examination, which he reportedly did later that day. The whereabouts of the doctor are currently unknown.

“We are also concerned about the safety of all the witnesses in this case, particularly Dr. Mohamed Osman, and we call on the government to provide adequate protection to them,” Sam Zarifi said.

Amnesty International called on Malaysian authorities to grant bail to Anwar Ibrahim if and when they do charge him. He was previously denied bail in 1998 on “national security” grounds.

“It’s fair for the Malaysian people and the international community to judge the Malaysian government’s respect for the rule of law based on how they proceed with this case,” said Sam Zarifi.

Background

Malaysian police informed Anwar Ibrahim on 6 August that he would be formally charged with "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and should present himself to the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court at 10 am on 7 August. Also on 6 August the Elections Commission announced that the by-election for the Permatang Pauh, Penang parliamentary seat, which Anwar is contesting, would be held on 26 August.

Armed police officers wearing masks arrested Anwar on 16 July and held him overnight after Azlan filed a complaint stating that Anwar had forcibly sodomized him. The investigation was reported to have concluded on 31 July.

Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad removed Anwar Ibrahim from his position as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister in September 1998, after disagreement between them on Malaysian financial policy related to the 1997 Asian economic crisis and Anwar’s public criticism of the Prime Minister. In April 1999, Anwar Ibrahim was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for corruption and was further sentenced to nine

years for sodomy in August 2000. The Federal Court overturned the sodomy conviction in September 2004 after Anwar had spent six years in prison. His corruption conviction disqualified him from running in elections or holding political office until April 2008.

Anwar began campaigning on 1 August 2008, a day after the resignation of his wife, Dr. Wan Azizah, from her Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat.

Anwar is the de facto leader of the Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance), a coalition of three parties opposing the ruling Barisan Nasional, which has led Malaysia since its independence in 1957. The Pakatan Rakyat won 82 of the 222 parliamentary seats in the March 2008 general elections. This was the first time since 1969 that the Barisan Nasional lost its two-thirds majority in the Parliament, the number required to defeat any veto attempts and to amend the Malaysian Constitution.

Anwar has called for a no-confidence vote against the government by September 16. He has stated that he can get at least 30 members of parliament from the ruling coalition to join the motion, thus ending the Barisan Nasional's decades-long rule.