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28 APRIL 1997

Malaysia: Amnesty International Condemns Verdict in Political Trial of Opposition Parliamentarian

The case against opposition parliamentarian Lim Guan Eng was politically motivated and an obvious move by the Malaysian Government to silence a leading critic, said Amnesty International protesting today's verdict.

Today, the High Court in Malacca found Lim Guan Eng guilty of sedition and spreading false news and fined him a total of RM 15,000 (approximately US\$ 6,000). As a consequence he faces the loss of his seat in parliament.

"The case against Lim Guan Eng fits the government's strategy of selectively using repressive laws to discourage dissent," Amnesty International said. "While the court has thankfully stopped short of jailing Lim, its fine is enough to bar him from parliament and deprive his constituents of their elected representative."

"Lim Guan Eng's fine should be revoked and he should not be deprived of his parliamentary seat," the organization said.

Lim Guan Eng, a member of parliament for Kota Melaka (Malacca) and Deputy Secretary-General of the Opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP), went on trial in January 1996. He had been charged under the Sedition Act with "*prompting disaffection with the administration of justice*" after he publicly criticized the Malaysian Government's handling of allegations of statutory rape made against the former Chief Minister of Malacca, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik, in 1994. He was also charged under the Printing Presses and Publications Act with "*maliciously printing*" a pamphlet allegedly containing "*false information*" about the case.

Lim Guan Eng had faced up to six years' imprisonment. Members of parliament who are jailed for a year, or who are fined more than RM 2,000 (approximately US\$ 780), automatically forfeit their parliamentary seat.

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