

## Man who accused Ibrahim of sodomy swears by Quran, poll hots up

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's former aide, who had accused him of sodomy, has sworn by the Holy Quran and repeated the charge, prompting many to challenge the leader, who is in the midst of a by-election campaign, to prove his innocence by following suit.

However, Ibrahim who hopes to win the poll and challenge Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's government in parliament, has dismissed it, reported the New Straits Times Sunday.

The aide, Mohammed Saiful Bukhari Azlan, 23, has done so 'as directed by the police', Ibrahim said Saturday after filing his nomination in the Permatang Pauh parliamentary constituency.

'It is obvious because Saiful is now under police custody,' he was quoted as telling a political rally by the New Straits Times.

Ibrahim claimed that even in 1998, when he had faced the same charge, the police had forced his accuser, Sukma Dermawan Sasmitaat Madja, to confess that he had been sodomised by Anwar.

Madja, Anwar's adopted brother, was sentenced to jail terms in 1998 and 2000 in connection with sodomy cases.

Ibrahim, who was then deputy prime minister, was sacked by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and suffered a long jail term before being acquitted.

Mahathir Saturday dared Ibrahim to swear by the holy book. As a figure on the Malaysian political scene, Ibrahim should act in accordance with public sentiment that he said required that he give a sworn statement pertaining to the sodomy allegation.

The action would be considered to be just a good political gesture because Ibrahim himself had to provide legitimate evidence to prove that he was not guilty in the matter.

As nominations closed Saturday, incidents of violence were reported. Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar warned that anyone trying to raise religious or racial issues during the campaign was liable to be charged with sedition, a serious offence under the Malaysian law.

'Why is Saiful making the declaration on the eve of Nomination Day?' asked Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Ibrahim's wife who facilitated the by-election by resigning her seat last month.

Azlan's act of placing his hand on the holy book while swearing his accusation has acquired religious overtones, and has also raised objections. Ismail called it 'a desperate act'.

The act was termed 'un-Islamic' by Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, who is the spiritual advisor on the opposition Pan Islamic party.

He said there was no requirement in the Quran that called on Muslims to hold the holy book while making a solemn declaration.

'It is normal for Christians to swear on the Holy Bible. It seems that he wanted to follow the Christian

way of doing it.

'In Islam, it is enough to say the three holy words - wallahi, wabillahi, watallahi. There is no need to hold the Quran,' said Nik Mat.

Taking a legal view, Democratic Action Party's Indian origin chairman Karpal Singh said Azlan's swearing was 'something not right to do' because the matter was pending in court.

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