

08 FEB 1999

Court-Anwar (Afternoon)

ANWAR ADMITS HE WAS RELUCTANT TO LODGE REPORT

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 8 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim admitted in the High Court here today that he was initially quite reluctant to lodge a police report over allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

The former deputy prime minister and former finance minister, testifying in his defence on four charges of corrupt practice, said that former Special Branch Director Datuk Mohamed Said Awang and his deputy then, Datuk Amir Junus, suggested to him to lodge a police report to facilitate investigations into the matter.

"Initially, I was not supportive or agreeable to the proposition because we received hundreds of these letters and I thought the prime minister was right then in giving me the advice to ignore such letters. Furthermore, we have similar allegations made against others and I have yet to come across one who lodges a police report," Anwar said.

He said his initial reaction or reluctance to make a police report should not be considered as him being unprepared to be investigated.

Anwar said that one instance where no police report was lodged was the case which implicated Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob over the murder of a video distributor, Mustakizah.

Anwar, 51, is alleged to have used his position to interfere in police investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

He is charged under Section 2(1) of the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance No 22 of 1970 which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years' imprisonment or fine of RM20,000 or both.

Anwar, who took his oath in Bahasa Malaysia and later gave his testimony in English, told the court that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had advised him to ignore the letter dated Aug 5, 1997 which contained the allegations.

"I read the letter. It was handed to me by the PM. He told me to read it and to destroy it, and he gave me a short lecture on how to deal with it, saying that even he himself has received serious allegations...married to a Singapore Chinese girl. And he said his decision is always to ignore them and he advised me to do so too," he said.

When counsel Raja Aziz Addruse asked him why he lodged a police report, Anwar said he trusted Mohamed Said when he said the allegations were critical because "we should not allow irresponsible animals to proceed with such a malicious allegation and to find out the truth including those conspiring with them".

Anwar said when he decided to lodge the police report, he thought that the investigation would be confined to the letters and to the conspirators and it would not lead to the investigation into his character.

He said after Mohamed Said and Amir told him that they suspected attempts by some politicians to smear his reputation, he agreed with their suggestion that the allegations must be investigated thoroughly and Mohamed Said said "deeply".

"They told me that the IGP had already received a letter and as they came to see me after their meeting with the IGP, my impression was that the IGP was fully aware of what they intend to do," he said.

Anwar said Mohamed Said and Amir were concerned because they believed that "there were other personalities involved in the writing of the letter, of planning, orchestrating and we must appreciate that our discussions were very frank and open".

Earlier, when asked regarding the atmosphere during the meetings with Mohamed Said and Amir, Anwar said: "Cordial, informal and friendly like most of my meetings with the AG," he said, smiling at Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah who headed the prosecution team.

Anwar said the Special Branch was concerned over the letter because they felt the issue was related to the security of the country and an attempt to smear the reputation of the leaders.

"They were keen to investigate to find out the personalities involved and those who orchestrated it from behind. I agreed with them because to my mind, I know fully well the malicious intent of the writer and that I have political foes who would stop at nothing to achieve their agenda," he said.

He also told the court that he did not believe any of the organisations including Abim (Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement) mentioned in an anonymous letter "Talqin Terbuka Untuk Anwar Ibrahim" (Last Rites For Anwar Ibrahim), and Mohamed Said and Amir concurred with him on that matter.

When asked whether he gave any direction to arrest Ummi Hafilda Ali and Azizan Abu Bakar, the woman and the man responsible for the letter containing the allegations of his sexual misconduct, Anwar denied that he gave such instructions to Mohamed Said and Amir.

"There was no discussion or suggestion by me or by them on the arrest of Ummi (Hafilda) and Azizan. What they told me was that they were searching for them. It was my understanding then that they want to talk to these people after the police report was lodged by Zull Aznam," he said. (Zull Aznam Haron was Anwar's aide-de-camp).

"I left it to the police to handle the matter. I trusted the wisdom and competence of the police. No longer so now," he said.

Anwar said that from time to time, particularly before the Umno general assembly, politicians including himself were bound to receive many hate mail letters and such letters were written against many people including the prime minister and other ministers.

He said he did not take the matter regarding the letter very seriously when Mohamed Said and Amir expressed their concern over the timing of the letter which coincided with the Umno general assembly.

"And I told them of the PM's advice. I (myself) considered the allegation to be malicious, scurrilous and irresponsible and I denied the allegations vehemently," he said.

He said Ummi Hafilda's letter was the first one to make allegations against him and he received a letter with the same covering letter addressed to the prime minister but the contents were shorter and milder, part of the allegations being against her brother, Mohamed Azmin Ali, for not helping her. (Mohamed Azmin was Anwar's former private secretary).

Earlier, he said Mohamed Said and Amir frequently met him prior to and after 1997.

"Although they were responsible to the Minister of Home Affairs, they came to see me to brief me on the latest political and economic issues and on general public reaction to government policies and the leadership," he said.

Anwar said they came to see him for the same reason that many other senior officers because they did not have the access to the prime minister as they have to him and they wanted him informed on those matters.

He said these meetings occur at least once a month and there were occasions when the meetings were fixed more than once and they were fixed by Mohamed Azmin and most of the meetings were arranged by Amir and ASP Zull Aznam.

"Because of my schedule, I normally see them at home after a function or dinner. This is not unusual as I do this with other senior officers and ministers at home, at night, between 9.30pm to 10.30pm, or even later," he

said.

Anwar said he considered the meetings between him, Mohamed Said and Amir over the allegations as "very private and purely personal".

When asked about Ummi Hafilda and Azizan's arrest on Aug 17, 1997, Anwar said both the Special Branch senior officers came to his official residence and told him that they were arrested at Dr Ristina Majid's house in Bangsar and he was also briefed on the involvement of Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin, Dr Mahathir's political secretary, and both officers believed there were many others involved.

"I did not know Dr Ristina personally. I have heard of her and aware of her connection with the rich and famous around KL," he said.

Anwar said that he, together with Mohamed Said and Amir, had a longer discussion that night because they explained to him Aziz's involvement would certainly complicate the issue for the case and Dr Ristina on the other hand was quite well-known to the VIPs.

"I happened to be an exception...no regrets," Anwar said, and smiled.

At this juncture, Justice Datuk S. Augustine Paul told Anwar not to make any comments unless he wanted it to be recorded. Anwar responded by saying "put it on record".

He admitted that since Ummi Hafilda and Azizan were arrested, he was a bit concerned that they might be detained for much too long.

He said that once he knew of the involvement of Aziz and Dr Ristina in the matter, he was keen that the police should investigate it "thoroughly and get to the bottom of it".

When asked why Aziz's involvement complicated the matter, Anwar said it was because he was the prime minister's political secretary and within the Umno leadership, it was generally known that he harbours enmity towards him and had been opposing him right through.

Anwar said that during the discussion, Mohamed Said and Amir were curious to know of his personal relationship with the prime minister and he assured them that the relationship then was "excellent".

"I don't believe at that time that the PM approved of the involvement of Aziz. (I am) naive, I supposed," Anwar said.

He said when Azizan apologised to him in a meeting at his house, he was not too pleased with the explanation given but when Azizan mentioned that he would be a "murtad" (apostate) if he continued with the allegation, Anwar said he forgave Azizan and told Azizan to go home.

"I thought he was really genuine," Anwar said and later explained that apostasy was a very serious offence for a Muslim to commit and he took it very seriously as Azizan had used that word.

Hearing continues at 9am tomorrow.

--BERNAMA

NHD/SBB AHH RM