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Daim takes to the political platform to deny charges by Anwar

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin today took to the political platform to deny charges by former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim against the Government, the Prime Minister and himself.

He elaborated on the instances Anwar had "changed his stories" from the time he was in the Government to that after his sacking.

Winding up debate at the Umno general assembly, Daim said it was not true that he had squandered RM600 million of Umno's money and that he took RM1 billion to Zurich, Switzerland, as claimed.

Daim also dismissed as lies Anwar's allegations that the Prime Minister had never indicated that he would resign soon.

And while Anwar was the one who extended the gaming licence in Sabah after it expired, the former Umno deputy president made it out that "I was the one who gave the approval".

Elaborating on the allegation that he carried RM1 billion on board a MAS aircraft, Daim said it was an absurdity that he took the cash to the airplane, placed the cash contained in a briefcase next to his seat and informed the pilot about it.

"I know we can put RM1 million into a briefcase," he said. "If there are RM10 million, you would need 10 briefcases and if there are RM100 million, you would need 100 briefcases."

"But if there is RM1 billion, I don't know how many briefcases are needed ... I have only two hands ...

"And where do you store RM1 billion cash inside your home? And for what purpose?"

To bring such huge amounts of cash, Daim said it would not be easy to go through airport checks, especially through the security X-rays.

It was investigated by the Prime Minister who secured a letter from the pilot dismissing the allegation, he said.

Even then, Daim said it was not that easy for banks to allow a cash withdrawal of RM10 million as the amount would be queried by Bank Negara, what more if the amount was RM1 billion.

He triggered laughter in the assembly when he admitted that he was a "miser", in that he hardly carries cash, only spends using a credit card and was forced to borrow from the party secretary-general Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob when giving a donation to Tabung Barisan Bertindak Kosovo yesterday.

On the allegation that he misappropriated RM600 million from Umno's coffers, Daim explained that all cash donations to Umno were issued with receipts, besides a full account given to the party president.

He recounted that when he took over as party treasurer, the party was debt-ridden and it was such a "headache" to raise funds to settle them.

He said Umno had been able to settle all its debts and its headquarters building (Putra World Trade Centre) had now been fully paid for.

The rental that it now received for the building went towards funding party administration and activities, he said.

On Anwar's allegation that the Prime Minister had never indicated his desire to retire, Daim said Anwar was not telling the truth.

He recounted an incident on the eve of nomination day for the 1995 general election when both Anwar and he rushed to the Prime Minister's residence in Kedah upon hearing that he (Dr Mahathir) contemplated not

offering himself for nomination.

At that time, Anwar was campaigning in Penang and he was doing the same in Sungai Petani.

"Anwar came over to see me at Sungai Petani and we both went to see Dr Mahathir at his home, pleading with him not to retire."

He said Dr Mahathir indicated to both of them that he would retire at the end of 1998.

"Now Anwar claims that he does not remember this," he quipped.

"In 1996, Anwar requested me to ask the president on when he's going to retire. And I asked the president and he said in 1998."

This was why there was a resolution at the 1996 Umno general assembly that there would be no contest for the party president's post. But Anwar insisted that there would also be no contest against the deputy president, Daim said.

At the end of 1997, Dr Mahathir again indicated his desire to retire to Daim and Anwar, but Daim said he and Anwar pleaded against it, citing that because of the economic downturn, the Prime Minister should not simply let go of his post.

"So how can Anwar say that he didn't know of Dr Mahathir's wish to retire?" Daim asked.

"In this world, all kinds of baffling and crazy things can happen."

On the gambling licence he purportedly approved for Sabah in 1996, Daim said only the Finance Minister can make such approval.

"Even if I wanted to give, it would be worthless," he said.

"In 1996, someone else was the Finance Minister. Now I want to hear the Opposition's reaction to this."

Daim also refuted allegations that many Ministers had opposed the introduction of the Anti-Corruption Act.

He said it was untrue that many Ministers were against the Act, because such proposal had to be passed by the Cabinet first.

"Ours is a collective Government," he said, adding that it was instead Anwar who had claimed the credit for it.

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