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`PM told me to dismiss allegations contained in letter and sworn statement'

Ruslaini Abbas; Satwant Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was told by the Prime Minister to dismiss allegations made against him (Anwar) in a letter and also in a sworn statement as "rubbish", the High Court heard today.

Anwar said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad gave him a letter written by businesswoman Ummi Hafilda Ali and a sworn statement made by Azizan Abu Bakar (on being sodomised) in early August 1997.

He said the documents were given to him during one of his daily meetings with Dr Mahathir at which the Prime Minister had brought up the subject of the allegations.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir stated that the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob had handed over the letter and the sworn statement to him.

"He (Dr Mahathir) said that this was one of the usual surat layang (poison-pen letter) and then he handed the letter over to me. He told me to read it and destroy it," he said.

Anwar was making his defence on a charge of sodomising Azizan in 1993.

He allegedly committed the offence with his adopted brother businessman Sukma Darmawan Sasmitaat Madja, who is also facing a second charge of abetting Anwar in sodomising Azizan.

Azizan is the former driver of Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

Anwar said the Prime Minister had asked what was the problem between Ummi and her brother Mohd Azmin Ali, who is the former private secretary of Anwar.

"I told him I would find out from Azmin," he said.

Anwar said he read the letter and the sworn statement in his office soon after receiving them from the Prime Minister.

He said he called up Azmin and told him to read the letter since it involved his sister, and also told him to destroy both the letter and the statement.

Anwar said Azmin, who read the letter, was "visibly upset that the sister was prepared to write the letter to smear him (Azmin), his wife and me".

He said at this point, the Prime Minister had yet to meet both Ummi and Azizan, and that Dr Mahathir only met both of them in August last year for the first time.

To another question by his counsel Karpal Singh, he said the Prime Minister subsequently referred to the matter of the allegations by way of "giving me fatherly advice".

He said Dr Mahathir told him: "To ignore it, dismiss it and learn that in politics you are bound to receive many more such malicious allegations."

Anwar said Dr Mahathir even gave a specific example of a poison-pen letter written about him which made wild allegations but he (Dr Mahathir) chose to ignore and dismiss it.

He said the Prime Minister had also told him that he did not lodge any police report on the matter.

Asked what was his reaction to the allegations, he said: "I was disturbed in a way because this happened to be the first time that such an allegation was made against me."

Karpal Singh: Did you contemplate any action against the writers (of the letter and sworn statement) at that time?

Anwar: No, because the letter was not circulated to the public.

To another question, he said he told Dr Mahathir right from the moment he was handed the letter and statement that it was slander.

Karpal Singh: Did it cross your mind to confront Azizah Abu Bakar and Ummi at that time?

Anwar: I thought I needed to get clarification from them as to why they chose to fabricate these stories but since the Prime Minister was very strong in his advice and the letter was destroyed, I left it at that.

The trial was adjourned about an hour after the morning session had begun because judge Datuk Arifin Jaka was not feeling well.

The court had sat at 9.35am with Anwar continuing to make his defence. However, after the adjournment, Deputy registrar Rozilah Salleh said the trial would continue on Friday.