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Keng Yaik: Anwar pushed Chong to challenge me

Leong Shen-li

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik today accused Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim of instigating former central committee member Datuk Joseph Chong to challenge him for the presidency in 1996.

Showing a letter from Chong admitting this, Dr Lim said he now believed Anwar, the former Deputy Prime Minister, was behind a conspiracy to oust him.

Referring to Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech in the party's general assembly yesterday, Dr Lim said Anwar's conspiracy was not only to unseat Umno leaders but to topple Barisan Nasional component party leaders who supported Dr Mahathir.

Speaking to reporters after the party's central committee meeting, Dr Lim said Chong was approached by Anwar's private secretary on the eve of the 1996 National Day celebrations in Kota Kinabalu, asking him to meet Anwar at a hotel.

Reading from Chong's letter, Dr Lim said: "When I met him, Anwar wanted to know of my political plans in the then coming Gerakan assembly. I told him I might want to contest the post of secretary-general.

"He then instigated me to go for the party presidency."

Chong, the party's MP for Batu then, did not manage to contest the post as he was sacked from the central committee and later resigned. He is now an independent MP.

Dr Lim said Chong, in his letter, claimed that Anwar was such a convincing talker that he gave him the impression that the contest was with the Prime Minister's blessing.

"Chong claimed that he was `totally ill-advised and misled all the way' after that meeting. Chong went on to say he was in fact not prepared to assume the party presidency as he was unable to put aside his business commitments on such short notice.

"He was then only a new MP. He said he regretted being instigated by Anwar and admitted his act was reckless.

"He said he could now see a clearer picture in the hidden agenda of Anwar. All along, he was given to understand that Anwar's instructions represented Umno's and also that of the BN," Dr Lim said.

Dr Lim, who is the Primary Industries Minister, said Chong admitted that his move had brought discord in the party.

He said Chong's letter, which he received in January, clearly showed that Anwar was not only behind a conspiracy to unseat the Umno leadership.

"It is a greater conspiracy to try to knock out people who are close to Dr Mahathir and support him," he said.

Dr Lim said he did not believe the theory when Chong decided to challenge him, even though many, including Chong himself, indicated that he had Anwar's backing.

"I put it out of my head as it is an understanding within the BN that component parties do not meddle with the leadership of other parties."

He said Anwar vehemently denied any connection with Chong's challenge despite Dr Lim not mentioning the issue when they both met during the elections.

Asked why he chose to reveal the letter now, Dr Lim said it was the right time to make public the existence of the letter.

He added that Chong had not been "forgiven" by virtue of the letter, adding that he had caused considerable discord within the party.

He said Chong had given him an undertaking that he would not be defending his Batu seat at the coming general election.

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