

## **Project IC: Anwar says he was kept out of the loop**

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Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim conceded that he had some knowledge of the citizen-for-votes operation in Sabah, allegedly spearheaded by Umno in the early 1990s when he was the party's deputy president.

However, he said that whatever information he received were from "secondary sources" as he was kept out of loop in the highly covert operation popularly known as Project IC or Project M.

"It was a special operation under the Prime Minister's Office and the Home Ministry at that time directly under Mahathir (Mohamad) and Megat Junid (Megat Ayub).

"There was a system (in which it was) operated, and the sum (of funds or people involved) was never referred to the cabinet, or Umno supreme council or the political bureau.

"To be fair, I certainly knew from some secondary sources, (but) clearly it was a very secretive operation," said the PKR de facto leader in an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini on Thursday.

Anwar has been accused of having a hand in the operation as he was instrumental to bringing the Malay-base party to Sabah in 1991.

Mahathir has denied any involvement, while the outcome of a 1997 parliamentary select committee which heard the testimonies of civil servants detained under the Internal Security Act was never made public.

The project hogged the spotlight recently with fresh allegations of similar attempts by Umno to naturalise immigrants to bolster support in the next general election.

Earlier this month, the Hulu Selangor Umno division was accused of writing to the Home Ministry seeking citizenship for some 2,000 people while a police report was lodged over a similar case in Sepang.

Hulu Selangor Umno chief Mohamed Idris Abu Bakar, however, claimed that the letter was forged.

### **Round 2 of Project IC could be worse**

Nevertheless, Anwar claimed that the new revelations raise concern of a nationwide operation, particularly in Pakatan Rakyat-held states.

He also believes that the second coming of the Project IC, this time in the peninsula, is likely to be worse.

"I don't believe that (what happened in Sabah) was like what is happening now. I have never heard Umno machinery or party apparatus being used like this and I can be challenged on that," he said.

In the Sabah case, village heads were prosecuted for producing false statutory declarations to illegal immigrants as proof of birth to allow them to obtain identity cards.

According to Anwar, despite being a "powerful deputy president", he was never involved in the financial matters of Umno and that he was not a signatory to a single cheque issued by the party.

He said the party finances were all under the direct control of then treasurer Daim Zainuddin and Umno boss Mahathir.

Yet, he estimates that the Sabah operation cost "hundreds of millions of ringgit" and that the nationwide endeavour would mean several hundreds more.

"You mean to say that Umno volunteers are doing this? No, huge corporations (are involved)," he claimed.

While the matter is serious, and should be investigated, the Permatang Pauh MP doubts that it will be dealt with, considering the likely involvement of the Home Ministry.

"This time there is a police report lodged so there must be investigations, but how do you investigate if the police or the Home Ministry is involved?

"(Home Minister) Hishammuddin (Hussein) was being very dismissive (when he should be) saying that we have to study this serious matter, a very serious allegation. (He said) nothing (of that sort)," said Anwar.

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