

I didn't appoint Wolf's girlfriend, says Anwar

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has denied having a hand in getting the high pay rise for Shaha Ali Riza, girlfriend of World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz.

The former deputy prime minister, who is the chairman of Foundation for the Future, said he did not appoint Riza to the foundation.

"She was first assigned by the World Bank, through the US State Department, to the foundation in late 2005, before I became chairman.

"The executive committee decided in mid-December 2006 to regularise the appointment so that Shaha (Riza) advised directly from the World Bank and not the State department," he said in a statement.

Reports said Anwar had written to a letter to Robin Cleveland, Wolfowitz's counsellor at the World Bank, last October, asking for Riza to be transferred from the State Department to the foundation.

The move raised her pay by 36% to US\$193,590 (RM658,255).

This became a controversial issue for Wolfowitz, who agreed to leave his World Bank post due to the ethical issue raised over Riza's pay rise.

Anwar has known Wolfowitz for more than 20 years, when the latter was the US ambassador to Indonesia back in the late 1980s.

In his press statement, Anwar said the setting up of the Foundation for the Future was announced in Bahrain in November 2005 by foreign ministers for an independent body, comprising governments and civil societies to support NGOs in developing democracy and freedom in the Middle East and North Africa.

He said US\$56mil (RM190.5mil) was promised to the foundation but to date, it had only received funds from Turkey, Britain and Jordan, and none from the United States.

Anwar said he had been invited to join the board of the foundation in mid-2006 and at the first board meeting, he said, he was unanimously chosen as the chairman.

Umno Youth deputy chief Khairy Jamaluddin said on Sunday that Anwar must explain his role in the controversy involving Wolfowitz and Riza, clarify his relationship with Wolfowitz, and explain his motives for heading a foundation "bankrolled" by the United States.