

Azmin: I am blamed for all PKR's ills
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PKR deputy president Azmin Ali says he has been unfairly blamed for all the ills in the party just as Putrajaya continues to lay the blame on party de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim for all the problems in the country.

Azmin said the accusations levelled against him include being linked to incidents of fraud in the ongoing PKR election, where a division in Batang Sadong, Sarawak was suspended from voting pending a probe by the party's election committee for polls irregularities.

"I know there are many accusations against me as there is an internal party election campaign going on, but please don't overdo it," Azmin told the 100-odd members who met him in Hotel Sunway in Seberang Jaya, yesterday.

"I am a little affected by it, but never mind. Remember what Anwar said, we are a family so don't be too harsh on another, " added the Gombak MP.

Accompanying Azmin on stage at the event were other candidates, including Penang executive councillors and assemblypersons Afif Bahardin (Seberang Jaya) (left), Malik Abul Kassim (Batu Maung), Nibong Tebal MP Mansor Othman and Selangor exco and Sementa rep Dorayah Alwi and Sri Andalas assemblyperson Xavier Jayakumar.

The group came to lobby for support as members cast their votes in Penang today in the party's direct polls which begun on Apr 25 to May 12.

So far, Azmin is leading the race for the deputy president post against Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim and incumbent secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution Ismail.

Saifuddin was in Bayan Baru on Friday, with his team, MPs Rafizi Ramli (Pandan) and Sim Tze Tzin (Bayan Baru), but their session was conducted behind closed doors.

'Umno's DNA'

Azmin lamented that he was also accused of having "Umno's DNA" in him, for his godfather-godson link to former premier Dr Mahathir Mohammad and charges of him being "ultra-Malay".

"My two rivals have more Umno DNA in them as they previously held positions in Umno. I have never contested for a post in Umno, nor have I held any position in the party before joining PKR," said Azmin.

"I only served Anwar, when he was a key Umno leader then, for 13 years as his personal secretary. He is not an ordinary politician, he is fighter and a statesman," said the Bukit Antarabangsa assemblyman.

In brushing aside allegations that he was ultra-Malay, Azmin claimed that many non-Malay members have voted for him in several polling centres in Sarawak and Johor.

He denied he was boasting about his popularity, saying he merely wanted to explain the various hurdles he has gone through since joining the party 15 years ago.

"I am in a difficult position, on one side, there is a Tan Sri (Khalid, left) on the other is a Dato (Saifuddin), I don't have either positions," he said.

"But never mind, I don't need these titles. The most important thing is that I am with the members and have been loyal to the party," he stressed amid applause from the floor.

On his alleged closed links with Mahathir, Azmin said he had decided to support Anwar when the former deputy prime minister was sacked from office on Sept 2, 1998, before going on to launch the reformasi movement and PKR.

"So, what more is there to test?" he asked.

He also dismissed a theory that party members had been told to vote for Saifuddin (right) as Khalid insists on being Selangor menteri besar while Azmin was "madly" after the post.

"It's not as easy as that. Don't frame the elections into a Azmin versus Khalid war. I respect him and will not allow any personal character assassination against him," said Azmin.

He also said he has been criticised strongly for being "stubborn" as he was adamant in taking leaders to task for decisions which did not benefit the people as he practised a "new kind of politics".

Among his criticisms were the proposed Selangor massive pay hike (around 400 percent) for the MB, state excos, assemblypersons and speaker, the 500 percent increase in business licenses, and Official Secrets Act used on the water agreement between the state government, Putrajaya and concessionaire Syabas.

"Do you expect me to be quiet when such issues are against my conscience? To remain silent is to be a traitor to the party and the people," he asserted.