

**All signs point to Azmin as next MB**  
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Come next week, PKR deputy president Azmin Ali could be sworn in as the menteri besar of Selangor, replacing his political nemesis Khalid Ibrahim.

When PAS first proposed him and amid rife speculation that the palace does not favour PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, it was predicted that he would be the dark horse to emerge victorious.

Even Bernama, in its report regarding the swearing-in ceremony next Tuesday, also mentioned Azmin as the palace's choice but the sultan's private secretary Mohamad Munir Bani refused to confirm this.

Though not wanting to speculate on who would helm the state, a veteran political observer with close ties to the palace, agreed that Azmin would be the best candidate for the job.

"One thing certain, Wan Azizah would not be the menteri besar," he told Malaysiakini.

PKR and Anwar Ibrahim's insistence on submitting only Wan Azizah's name to the palace citing convention has twice drawn the ire of the ruler.

In the first reprimand, the palace described PKR and DAP as being insolent and defiant, forcing the parties to apologise.

Today, the palace took another swipe at Anwar, cautioning him against tainting the sultan's image and issuing confusing statements on the menteri besar issue.

Anwar was forced to seek another royal pardon.

Two cautions and two apologies later, it would be perilous for Anwar to reject the palace's choice should the sultan - whose patience for the opposition leader is wearing thin - appoint Azmin.

Unless he wants to lock horns with the ruler, Anwar would be forced to abide by the decision.

The stalemate over the menteri besar post has been a high-priced episode for both PKR and Pakatan Rakyat. The issue has strained ties and caused an internal rift in PAS as well.

Growing voice of discontent

Even within PKR, the voice of discontent is said to be growing louder with Anwar putting

the party on a confrontational path with the palace and providing fodder to its rivals.

PKR insiders told Malaysiakini that if Azmin is named, it is almost certain that Anwar would cave in.

"And if Anwar bows to the royal decision, the faction in the party that is opposed to Azmin will have to bow to Anwar," said an insider on condition of anonymity.

Furthermore, if Azmin, who is the Selangor PKR chief, is appointed, it would be unlikely that Pakatan state assemblypersons would table a no-confidence vote compared to a PAS candidate being made menteri besar.

To make matters worse, PAS is divided on whether to accept the post should one of its members be picked by the sultan.

It is speculated those who have a shot at the post are Selangor PAS chief Iskandar Samad as well as PAS excos Yunus Hairi and Sallehen Mukhyi, while PKR's Ijok representative Idris Ahmad is sometimes mentioned as having an outside chance.

It is also an open secret that while Azmin has expressed support for Wan Azizah, he has been eyeing the post for a very long time.

Pakatan leaders may not want to push the crisis to the point where the sultan might dissolve the state assembly, paving the way for a fresh polls, especially when surveys indicated that the protracted crisis had eroded support for the opposition bloc.

Finally, many also believe that Azmin, who has been with Anwar since his days in government, is more capable in administrating the state as compared to Wan Azizah.

Detractors claimed that she would be a remote-controlled menteri besar for her husband, while supporters feared that Pakatan rivals would continue to harp on the issue of nepotism.