

## **Azmin: PN plan came from Dr M to ensure he could continue as PM**

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The idea to form Perikatan Nasional (PN) came from ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself as a way to make him a prime minister supported by all MPs across all parties, claimed Senior Minister Azmin Ali.

Azmin, who was a key figure in the collapse of the elected Pakatan Harapan federal government and its replacement by the PN administration of Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, told The Star in an exclusive interview that the plan was to have held a general election by October, but that was shelved due to the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“PN is not a backdoor government as there was a vacancy (in the post of prime minister). I did not suggest at that time – if it (resignation of Dr Mahathir) did not happen then – that we knock on the door and take him out and we go in.

“That was not the plan or case,” said Azmin who is also International Trade and Industry Minister, Gombak MP, and Bukit Antarabangsa state assemblyperson.

Azmin revealed that prior to Mahathir's unexpected resignation, on Sunday, Feb 23 (day of the now infamous Sheraton Move) 131 statutory declarations from MPs across parties were presented to the palace.

“It was all for one name as the prime minister – Dr Mahathir.

“We were then trying very hard to make sure that Mahathir would continue to serve as the prime minister.”

Such a move was in contravention of the agreement that Mahathir himself had signed to hand over power to PKR president Anwar Ibrahim who was the leader of the largest party in Harapan.

“That was the meeting we had at his house on Feb 23 at 4pm when he met all the six political party leaders, including Bersatu president Muhyiddin Yassin, Umno president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Parti Warisan Sabah president Mohd Shafie Apdal, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) head Abang Johari, and myself,” said Azmin.

He pointed to the Malay Dignity Congress on Oct 6, 2019, in which most prominent Malay leaders except Anwar were present, and questioned why Mahathir had attended it with Umno and PAS if he was indeed against working

with Umno.

“We were thrown into a political crisis when the sitting prime minister Mahathir resigned.

“If Muhyiddin didn’t act within that small window, someone else could have rushed to the palace and pressured the palace in order to become the prime minister. I would not have allowed that to happen.

“The only option for Muhyiddin and me then was to leave Harapan, ” said Azmin, who was then PKR deputy president but left the party with nine other MPs.

Azmin added that during the Feb 24-28 period when Mahathir was interim prime minister, he worked day and night to get the numbers.

“If you don’t have the numbers, there is nothing much we can do. As there was no Parliament sitting then, under the Federal Constitution, the King had to decide who had the support of the majority to be PM.

“Finally, Muhyiddin got that majority. Of course, we came in as a new government, not through an election but through a political crisis. But that crisis came about because this man tendered his resignation.

“If Mahathir had not tendered his resignation that Monday, he would still be Prime Minister with a bigger majority,” insisted Azmin.

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He also denied that PN was a backdoor government saying: “The King opened the door for us to come in so it was not a backdoor government.”

He insisted that he did not choose Muhyiddin over Mahathir.

“I think we should just allow Muhyiddin to lead, especially during this pandemic.

“Whatever you may say, I think he has done a very good job – very focused on handling the Covid-19 pandemic and reviving the economy with less politics.

Azmin also admitted that had the Covid-19 pandemic not happened, an election would have been held last month.

“Although we came in with a majority, with all humility, I must say the majority is small.

“When the majority is small, the government is weak.

“When the government is weak (or) not stable, then we do not have the opportunity to focus on the delivery for the rakyat.

“If you ask me, of course, we are ready to go back to the rakyat to get the mandate. If you ask me when we should have gotten the mandate, I would say it should have been last month but unfortunately, we are facing the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

Azmin admitted that due to the spike of Covid-19 cases after the Sabah state elections, the word "election" had become toxic.

He said society currently could not accept a general election and that they only want the government to mitigate the effects of Covid-19, help retain jobs, and make sure there is food on the table.

He added that only the Health Ministry could give the green light for elections before PN's term expires.

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