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to his political

In remarks
PKR divisions
said he was
lifestyle.



Azmin: I've been through the mill
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PKR deputy presidential aspirant Azmin Ali yesterday met head-on perceptions that have dogged him even before the reformasi, the movement that gave birth party.

made to some 60 officials from several in Johor at Permas Jaya, Azmin (*right*) neither sybarite nor spartan in his

He also said his loyalty to the party was more expansive than his critics have claimed, which was that it was Anwar-centric.

"They say I own a Ferrari," began Azmin (*left*), a smooth speaker in Bahasa and a competent one in English - he adeptly switched back and forth between the two - while campaigning for votes among divisional leaders who are apt to convey their impressions to other members who did not attend the meeting.

"If I had one I would have driven it here from Kuala Lumpur," he cracked to his audience.

"And I would have come along for the ride," chimed Chua Jui Meng, PKR Johor liaison chief (*below*), to laughter from attendees.

"People saw a friend's Ferrari at my house one day and concluded I owned one," offered Azmin about the origins of stories of his hedonistic tastes.

Azmin used that entrée to the topic of his sybaritic friends to tackle the perception he had gained from their deep pockets, that as gatekeeper for Anwar Ibrahim when the latter was finance minister, he had leveraged on their largesse.

"Once they cut a cake on my birthday while we were on a flight and there was a bag with half a million Ringgit in it. I told Datuk Seri Anwar that the money should be given back to wherever it came from," said Azmin, warming to his theme that he was the target of malicious stories.

Eyes glistening with emotion, he said stories circulated about him and his family had reached extents where his wife Shamsida Taharin's (*left*) fidelity was questioned and he had to send their daughter for a DNA test to ascertain paternity.

"The test confirmed I was her father," said Azmin (*with wife*), giving his listeners the impression that in his political career he had endured fortune's slings and arrows to an immoderate degree.

"I have gone through the mill," asserted Azmin, who alluded to the attacks on his private property, and instances of repression by the powers-that-be that included near-detention under the ISA, and the stories of his supposed wealth and of its dubious origins.



"But through it all, I have stayed loyal to the cause. I have never wavered and true members of PKR have seen that my ordeal could not have been borne if it was limited to individuals and not the party's ideals," he said to rousing applause.

Still, Azmin acknowledged the need to defend party supremo Anwar Ibrahim (*right*) against the looming possibility of another round of imprisonment over sodomy charges.

"After the party elections are over, my focus will be to defend Anwar against the threat of imprisonment. We contest each other now and then we reunite to defend him against unjust jailing," he said.

Shifting his sights to internal targets, Azmin said PKR stalwarts had suffered unjust detention under the ISA long before 'newcomers' to the party – he declined to be more specific – had resigned their government posts to register their protest and join other parties.

"I nearly suffered under that law and several of my compatriots have felt the full brunt of it, so we don't need anybody to wear opposition to the law as a badge for promotion up the PKR hierarchy.

"Why should we bargain for a situation where we bear the scars and other get to enjoy the stripes?" asserted Azmin to emphatic applause.

Finally, Azmin assured his listeners that after the party elections, a seminar would be held in Johor where all elected PKR MPs, assemblypersons and other leaders would attend to devise strategy for the party to do well in the next general election.

Later, Chua would take up this theme in his brief speech, giving a satiric twist to the Malay word for bastion ('kubu Umno') such that it was rendered as burial ('kubur Umno') grounds.

At the end of the two-hour plus meeting, Azmin mingled with obviously impressed divisional leaders before hurrying off to Kulai for another support- garnering function.

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