

2 gov't parties may defect: Azmin
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The opposition said that two political parties were considering defecting from the ruling coalition, which was hammered in March elections, to help it form a government.
MCPX

The defection of one of the component parties in the Barisan Nasional coalition would be a major blow for Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who has been fending off calls for his resignation since the polls.

Members of MCA and the Sabah Progressive Party (Sapp) however dismissed opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's comments that they were on the verge of switching sides.

But Azmin Ali, vice-president of Anwar's PKR, said negotiations with the two parties were progressing well, and that there were also talks with lawmakers from the ruling Umno.

Meetings held with Umno MPs too

"There's a strong possibility, and the discussion is still on-going, not only with MCA but also with Umno and other components of Barisan Nasional," he said.

"We've had a series of meetings with Umno lawmakers. There's no way we will form any coalition with Umno as a party, but we are more than happy to welcome any Umno MPs who are willing to support the cause."

pkrc 100408 azminAzmin would not say how many Umno lawmakers were interested in defecting, but he said the opposition already has the numbers to form a government though it wanted more time to ensure a smooth transition.

"It's going to be very soon, but certainly we need some time," he said, adding that the transition could be sooner than Anwar's stated deadline of mid-September.

Azmin said a recent 41 percent fuel price hike, which has triggered public anger and protests, had heaped further pressure on Abdullah by showing he could not manage the economy.

Denials predictable, says Azmin

MCA secretary-general Ong Ka Chuan, whose party's fortunes plummeted in the general elections that saw the opposition claim a third of parliamentary seats, dismissed the claims as "preposterous and absolutely false."

"All 15 MCA MPs have contacted me to deny ever meeting Anwar, let alone jump ship," he said.

"It is a lie. He leaks this 'claim' to the press, so that he can go to other Barisan Nasional component parties and say 'see, MCA has crossed over, you should join us, too,'" he said.

Sapp deputy president Raymond Tan said that despite its criticism of the government's performance in Sabah, the party had no intention of leaving the coalition.

Azmin said the denials were predictable because of the "culture of fear, intimidation and harassment in Malaysian politics."

"So you have to appreciate their predicament, but our discussions with the component parties are very positive and progressing very well," he said.

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