

How powerful really is Azmin?

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Parti Keadilan Rakyat vice-president Azmin Ali is under attack and accused of being so powerful that he controls Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and influences the way decisions are made in the party. But PKR's 'party planner' has not lost his sense of humour.

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AZMIN ALI



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AZMIN Ali, the vice-president of Parti Keadilan Rakyat, could not use his mobile phone for much of Friday.

He had been travelling a lot and had neglected to settle his phone bill, so Maxis barred his account.

But he joked that, "I've been busy controlling Anwar. He has just come back from overseas so I have to control him about what to do and say. I spend so much time controlling everything that I don't have time to pay my phone bills."

Azmin is under attack but he has not lost his sense of humour.

As many would know by now, Azmin has been accused by his one-time friend and former Youth chief Ezam Mohd Nor of being so powerful that he controls Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and influences the way decisions are made in the party.

Ezam, who announced his resignation on Monday, singled out Azmin as the chief source of problems in the party.

"I'm not angry but I am sad he has chosen this path," Azmin said of Ezam's accusations.

But how powerful really is Azmin in the party?

Everyone in the party knows that the centre of power in the

party lies with Anwar who is now known as the de facto leader of PKR.

Secretary-general and former corporate high-flyer Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim has become a key voice on economic issues but Azmin is an influential voice in the tight inner circle around Anwar when it comes to political and organisational matters.

He is also a superb planner and a local magazine which featured him as its cover story recently, quite aptly punned him as the "Party Planner".

And Azmin performs and delivers, as Anwar told those who have come to him complaining about the vice-president.

Even with accusations raining down like bullets, Azmin is holding election workshops this weekend for the key office-bearers of 26 parliamentary seats which the party thinks it has a good chance of winning.

His top placing as vice-president in the party polls has also given him an important mandate in the party.

It was no secret that he was eyeing the deputy president's post and he would have easily defeated Dr Syed Husin Ali had he not been pressured by Anwar to withdraw.

Anwar did the right thing. It was crucial that Syed Husin, who brought Parti Rakyat Malaysia into Keadilan, stay on as the No. 2 in the spirit of power-sharing.

Azmin is very powerful in the party but he is certainly not "the de facto leader of the de facto leader," as some have put it.

His attempt to take on Syed Husin in the party polls was probably at the urging of people who envisaged a more dynamic No. 2.

Dr Syed Husin is intellectual, principled and honest to the core. He has been very consistent in those respects but it has also made him somewhat rigid when

dealing with people who do not share his views and beliefs.

The way he fielded questions before a packed press conference last Thursday was quite astonishing.

When asked about Ezam's accusations about party leaders, he turned on the media and accused them of only playing up the party's woes, of falsifying the truth and manufacturing truth out of falsehood.

It was, as one of the reporters said later, rather reminiscent of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad when under pressure except that even the former premier did not sound so authoritarian.

The way he spoke about Ezam did not reflect well on him as an elder leader. After all, Ezam had spent two years in jail under the OSA and ISA in the name of the party.

Anwar handled the Ezam episode with much greater finesse at his own press conference the next day.

He was asked more or less the same questions and he answered them all. He also scolded the "government-controlled media" for playing up the issue but, as one reporter said, he was civil, engaging and well, charming which is a crucial asset in a people-oriented field like politics.

He expressed regret about Ezam's accusations but did not condemn him and even said he would not mind calling him to talk about things.

PKR was once compared to an onion - multi-layered, pungent, but full of potential uses.

But as each layer of the onion is peeled off, it has probably brought tears to Anwar's eyes as well.

He has no time for tears though because he is now on ground zero - the coming general election will make or break his party.