

# AZMIN'S SUPPORT FOR DR M FUELS ROW

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PKR deputy head's backing for Dr M to continue as premier sees tempers flare among Anwar's loyalists

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**D**ATUK Seri Azmin Ali's open support for Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's continued leadership as prime minister has been perceived as a snub against Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's expected appointment to the post, fuelling further speculation on warring camps within PKR.

The support, which was done in Azmin's capacity as economic affairs minister to illustrate a professional statement, saw tempers flare among grassroots leaders said to be loyal to Anwar.

Some have even called for Azmin to take garden leave from the party, which he co-founded alongside Anwar and family

members, including Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

In a tweet, Azmin said the reason behind his support for Dr Mahathir was due to the latter's leadership qualities.

"My statement in support of a proposal for @chedetofficial (Dr Mahathir) to continue as prime minister until the end of term is due to his very sensible leadership."

The tweet was posted before he went for a meeting with Selangor Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari, who is his loyalist, on the preparation for the 12th Malaysia Plan and forging closer ties between federal and state governments.

Azmin did not explicitly express his shift of support from Anwar, but the stand made in agreement to Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang's support for Dr Mahathir to remain in office until the next general election, had been understood as an affront to Anwar, whose loyalists have campaigned for him to be the next prime minister.

"Azmin needs to take leave as he seems to be unwell and not able to think clearly.

"He must relinquish all positions, be they in the government

or party," said Tanjung Karang Pakatan Harapan (PH) chairman Mohd Yahya Mat Sahri, who is also the constituency's PKR branch chief.

A senior PKR politician, Datuk Khalid Jaafar, an Azmin supporter, was perplexed over the outburst at the latter's statement.

"His reasons are clear.

"What we need to do is to focus on (political) stability, consistency in bringing in investments and create more jobs.

"Any support from the opposition is good, which can lead to a conducive environment to develop the country.

"We have to transcend political differences or affiliation and instead focus on economic growth," said Khalid, who is Institute for Policy Research chairman.

Anwar had been slated to be the eighth prime minister after Dr Mahathir, who had promised to honour the agreement made as part of PH's consensus ahead of GE14 last year.

Recently, there had been calls to speed up Anwar's appoint-

ment to the top executive office following speculation that his deputy, Azmin, is being groomed as the next prime minister instead.

However, the recent sex video, which Azmin is alleged to be involved in, had thrown the PKR leadership into a crisis, particularly on the heels of a revelation by Inspector-General of Police Datuk Seri Abdul Hamid Bador that a "malicious alliance" was the one behind the controversy.

Azmin's response to the revelation, which included a series of jobs said to be aimed at Anwar, turned the

former Selangor menteri besar into a black sheep among PKR's top leaders. This has led to speculation about his absence from the party's political bureau meetings.

The latest statement had nonetheless placed some of Azmin's allies at odds with the party's call for unity.

PKR vice-president Tian Chua had declined to elaborate on the matter but urged Azmin to remain focused on his work as



Datuk Seri Azmin Ali

a minister.

He reiterated that the decision on the next prime minister was made collectively by the PH leadership.

He said holding a debate on the matter would destabilise the PH coalition.

"He (Azmin) should stop talking about transition (of power) and, instead, should focus on stabilising the country's (economy)."

Meanwhile, Umno Youth vice-chief Shahril Hamdan said it was crucial for PH members to focus on their job rather than issuing such statements.

"For a stable Malaysia we need a government which cares more about policy-making than political intrigue, and an opposition which holds it to account on those same terms.

"This constant chatter about who is in which camp, who is about to take over and who is in what video, it fills column inches but does nothing to inspire youth about politics.

"I am bored of this, what more those outside the (political) bubble?"

"If this is what governing political parties focus on, don't be surprised if the younger generation stays home in the next general election."