

'It is likely I'll be PM next year'

Anwar says Dr M would be resigning at an 'appropriate time'

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (pic), who cut a deal to become the country's next prime minister ahead of last year's general election, says he should take power around May 2020.

"There's an understanding that it should be around that time but I don't think I should be too petty about the exact month.

"But there is this understanding that he will resign at the appropriate time," he said in an interview with Bloomberg Television here yesterday.

The PKR president and Port Dickson MP was asked whether the transition would happen two years after Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took power.

Anwar, 72, dismissed reports that his party deputy, Economic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, or Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir, the Prime Minister's son, would be considered for the role instead of him.

"There's no sign of any party introducing or promoting or lobbying for other names.

"This does not stop other individuals with ambitions with their own design. And this, to me, is quite irrelevant. Whether it has been discussed, whether it has been given legitimacy, the answer is no," he said.

Questions over when Anwar will take power have loomed over Malaysian politics ever since Dr Mahathir led Pakatan Harapan to a surprise general election victory last year.

Dr Mahathir has repeatedly promised to hand over power to Anwar, without setting a timeline.

He said he would step down once he found the country's situation on an even keel, which could take two or three years.

The conflict between Anwar and Azmin, including over sex videos allegedly featuring the latter, has raised the possibility the 94-year-old would extend his stay in power as the ruling coalition struggles to contain internal dissent.



Anwar's political secretary was detained over the leaked videos and later released.

In the interview, Anwar reserved his strongest comments on the impact of the forest fires burning in Indonesia that had caused a dangerous haze in parts of South-East Asia, disrupting air travel and forcing the closure of

schools.

"We should feel outraged and I consider this an ecological warfare.

"It is not a small matter. It is affecting essentially millions of our people," he said, noting that this required governments to be more assertive.

"We have to be stronger, regardless of whether it's Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia. I mean these are big companies, why are we not making sure they are being held accountable and at least bear part of the cost?"

Anwar also urged a review of the contract for the East Coast Rail Link,

which has been a feature of the trial of Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The former prime minister has been accused of offering projects to China in exchange for help resolving the debts of troubled state fund 1Malaysia Development Bhd.

In the interview, Anwar also said government policy must ensure fair distribution of wealth, fight corruption to address state leakages and reform the sedition law.

"The sedition law as it stands now cannot be defended and that has been our position," he said.

The government must also allay fears and concerns of ethnic Malays, noting that affirmative action was vital for all races to escape poverty, he also told Bloomberg.

Since taking government, Pakatan has struggled to maintain the support of the country's majority Malay-Muslim population.

Backlash from Malay groups forced the administration to backtrack from its promises to ratify international treaties on anti-discrimination and crimes against humanity.