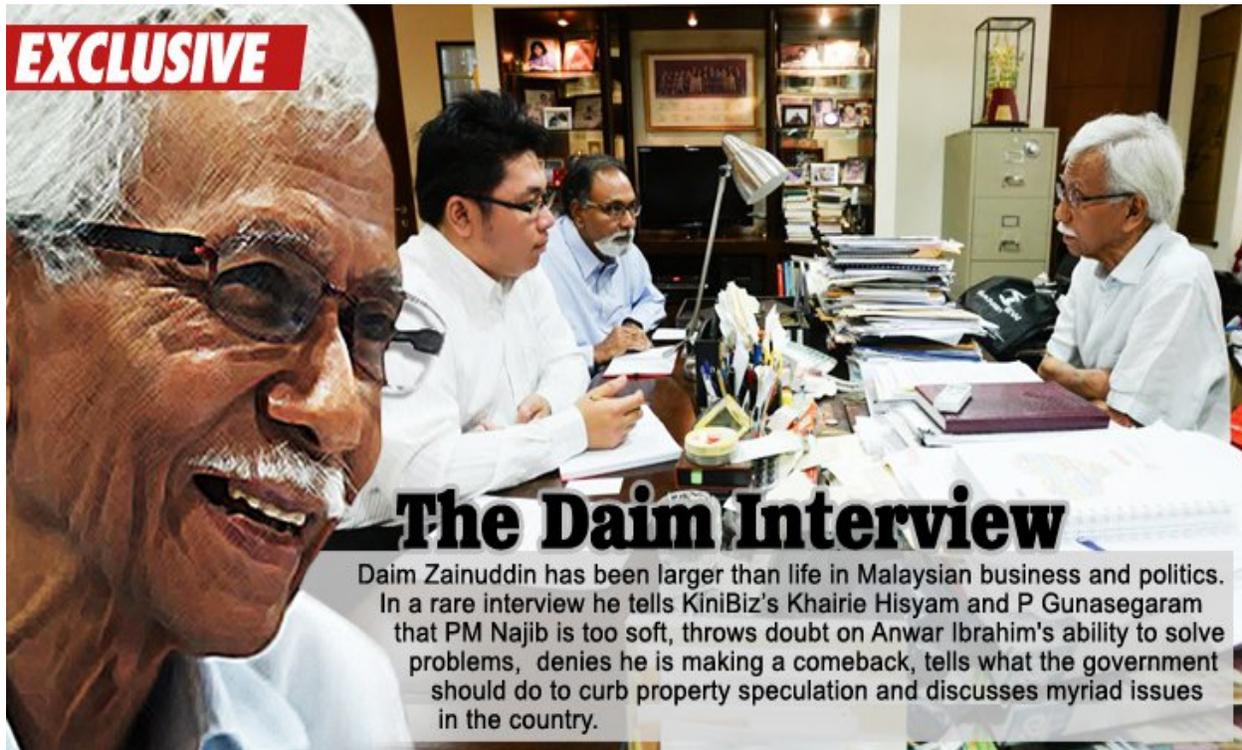


Daim: Najib is too soft



In the first part of the series, Daim speaks candidly on politics, among others commenting on whether Umno wants to replace prime minister Najib Abdul Razak whose leadership was described as weak.

Former finance minister Daim Zainuddin feels that prime minister Najib Abdul Razak should firm up.

“What they (people on the ground) want is strong leadership,” said Daim to KiniBiz, revealing that based on feedback he has received personally, many feel Najib is neither firm nor decisive enough.

Notably during the conversation Daim was emphatic about Malaysians turning serious attention to the country’s political situation “for the first time” and criticised the government’s weakness in dealing with inflation as well as agent provocateurs seeking to create religious tension.

However, Daim was also critical of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who he says “has never been able to solve any problem” even when part of the government. Overall, the former Umno treasurer feels that Anwar is also a weak leader.

Daim was speaking to KiniBiz in a rare face-to-face interview last week, during which he shared his take on a variety of subjects. In the first part of the series, KiniBiz focuses on the political aspect of the interview.

Notably, when speaking to the man there is a hint of toughness despite Daim’s cordial, friendly manner underscored by his simple cotton shirt and slippers. Occasionally there was a glint of steel in his eyes as he broached certain subjects — opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, for instance.



The stark contrast between his demeanour and the glimpses of the hardened man inside mirrors that of the unremarkable building in which his office is located and the lush interior space, adorned by myriad artworks from his personal collection.

Barely seated after brief introductions, the man pops the question: “Why are you writing about me?” That was perhaps to be expected given how he has shunned the limelight for so many years.

The Daim Interview Part 1 – Leadership issues

Are you more invested in cash now?

(Declined to say, laughing) Then people would interpret and say... (still laughing)

You don't want to do the same thing you did in 1994 lah (referring to a statement he made in 1994 about the stock market being overvalued which led to a crash).

It is not easy to answer. If you have cashed out, of course there is inflation and exchange rate etc, there is a big problem. But I would not be investing, not at this stage.

In the stock market, you mean?

(Laughing) At this stage.

Is that because of economic fundamentals or is it because of the political situation in the country?

Both, not only just here but also overseas where there are political issues too.

For the first time in history, people are looking seriously at the political situation here — seriously looking at it. They want to know what's happening. And if you see foreigners writing (about Malaysia), they're beginning to doubt the stability of the country.

I think what they want to see is strong leadership. And they perceive that there isn't one.



“ For the first time in history, people are looking seriously at the political situation here. — seriously looking at it. ”

So there isn't a strong leadership at the moment?

This is not me (saying), I'm talking about foreigners. They are questioning.

Do you think that the leadership is weak?

I'm a strong supporter of the government (laughing). And I have been criticising the government but sometimes they misinterpret it, thinking that I oppose the government — I don't.

What we want is to make sure that the government is moving in the right direction, that people have confidence in the government and support the government. But people want to see, they want to feel comfortable with the government. And I think that the majority — if you go to the ground — feels that something is not right somewhere.

But it is for the government now to make the assessment, not for me.

In which areas do you think the government has not been strong?

Many. Number one of course is that today, people say inflation is coming up.

People want to know why the government do all (the inflation-inducing announcements) at the same time. People start to criticise policies and ask why the timing is like this, why the announcements be in December when people's families need money for their children's school necessities and all those things.

It was not well-planned, the consequences not well thought of.

What about things like maybe political issues?

People are not happy. There is the talk about serious corruption in the government.

But really, corruption is bigger in the private sector (laughs). All studies show that 70% (of corruption) is clearly from the corporate sector.

What about things like religious issues, say the Allah issue for instance. Do you consider that a threat to the country?

It was never brought up before, this issue. It was never brought up. In Sabah and Sarawak it's not an issue. And why would you suddenly you want to bring this issue to Peninsular Malaysia?

Would you consider that the claim of Islam being under siege in Malaysia true?

I was brought up in a Catholic school (laughs). So I went through this (school) and there was never an issue. I think it's the politicians who like to highlight this kind of thing (religious issues).

Why do you think they are highlighting this?

Trying to get support, which is, I think, silly. We have always lived in peace and the question of religion has never risen.

Is it because the government doesn't have a strong mandate that a lot of people are trying to, say, pander to religious and racial sentiments?

Maybe. But when you say a strong mandate, Cameron (United Kingdom prime minister) doesn't have a strong mandate. And Australia, Gillard (former Australian prime minister) didn't have a strong mandate.

In the end it's about leadership and your policies. That's more important. In this country people always want peace and stability.

If there are those who are out there to create problems, you must nip them in the bud. There are enough laws to handle this. But if you delay, procrastinate, then people will take advantage. That's where the danger is.

“ *If there are those who are out there to create problems, you must nip them in the bud. There are enough laws to handle this. But if you delay, procrastinate, then people will take advantage. That's where the danger is.* **”**

- Daim Zainuddin

This one you're talking about both sides lah?

Yeah, both sides.

You were talking about leadership and policies, so what's your assessment of Najib in that sense?

Not me, this is what people tell me about him since sometimes I go to the ground. They want him to be firm and decisive.

See, we are a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society. So there are so many sensitivities. You must know how to handle that. You need a good team to advise you on how to handle these issues, you cannot do it alone.

So you need a strong cabinet and people who understand the history of the country, who can anticipate problems, not to react.



“ So you need a strong cabinet and people who understand the history of the country, who can anticipate problems, not to react. ”

- Daim Zainuddin

You must plan so that people know this is the direction that you're going to take and if people think it's a good direction to take, they will support it.

We're talking politics and not business now (laughing) I'm not a politician (anymore).

In this country it's very interrelated isn't it. I think in many countries it is (related) but in Malaysia in particular it is much more related.

It's again a perception. When Margaret Thatcher was prime minister, her son was doing business and she took him everywhere.

I'm told now that even Obama's family are doing business, I'm not sure how true it is, it's what people tell me.

While we're on the subject of politics—

(Starts laughing) You're business Kini (continues laughing)

...we have heard about the Kajang move, so to speak. Anwar is going to contest there. What's your take on the whole Anwar, Khalid and Azmin issue?

Anwar has never been able to solve any problem (laughing). Again, the weak leadership. He's not even elected in Parti KeAdilan Rakyat (PKR), yet he wields so much power and influence. He decides what to do and so far, the president and the rest are keeping quiet. They're elected fellows (laughs).

Anwar wants to be in the limelight all the time. Whether good news, bad news, it doesn't matter for him, as long as he's in the news (laughing). That's Anwar lah. And you all have given so much space to him — that's what he loves. It doesn't matter, even if you criticise him also it's news.

You praise him also it's news.

But this (Kajang move) is rubbish, wasting public funds. And now Khalid said (reportedly) that he's not going to resign (from the Mentri Besar post).

What Rafizi Ramli (strategic director, PKR) says is that they decided on this in response to, apparently, a conspiracy to take down Najib. They are apparently preparing for a change in Umno (United Malays National Organisation) leadership.

Changing? Before this they were going to have emergency in Selangor (laughs)

Is there a plan to replace Najib?

I don't know, I mean I'm not active anymore so I don't know.

There is some talk of Dr Mahathir not being happy with Najib as prime minister.

I mean Najib is still prime minister, he's president of Umno. How do you topple him unless Umno itself wants to do it? How are they going to do it? I don't know.



“Anwar wants to be in the limelight all the time. Whether good news, bad news, it doesn't matter for him, as long as he's in the news (laughing). That's Anwar lah.”

- Daim Zainuddin



I think, if you ask me and if I go to the ground, people come and see me....as I said, what they want is strong leadership. They want him to change. Not to change him (smiling).

They want him to change his policies, to show that he is decisive, wields power, controls cabinet, controls the country. That is what people want to see. Decisive, firm — I think that's what they want Najib to be.

Have you told this to Najib directly?

I won't tell you (laughing). Let's put it this way: I'm in touch with him. I love to write so I write a lot of letters to people, not only to Najib. I always get my two cents' worth of opinion in — nothing better to do.

Tomorrow: ["No fallout with Dr Mahathir"](#)