

Tantalising prospect of Anwar-Khairi showdown
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I read with great amusement as one gauntlet replaced another. Anwar Ibrahim's challenge to the prime minister for a debate was met with dismissal so characteristic of this premier's hyper-calculative nature.

Despite the alphabet soup of reforms, Najib Razak as premier is anything but spectacular – he speaks the right message but almost entirely in generalities, pushes the right buttons yet never hard enough, either in policy or rhetoric, to ever be considered a transformative leader once history displaces the fleeting contingencies of the present.

Looking back, Pak Lah might have slept a little at work, but Najib is proving himself quite the dull PM.

But if the present is our concern, then it is entirely in keeping with Najib's character that he should reject such overtures for a debate, if only because he knows he cannot match Anwar on the stage. I imagine Anwar, too, anticipated Najib to fold.

But I wonder if in Anwar's rush to grab the blinds he might have forgotten to factor in someone else on the table not averse to raising the stakes, especially when his chips are down. Like Najib, the great pretender Khairy Jamaluddin is probably shrewder than he'd like us to believe.

The challenge to Anwar is no rash move. With political hiatus probably just around the corner, why not continue his legacy project of sorts to which he can return if and when it suits him?

But unlike Najib, Khairy might just give Anwar a run for his money. He might just match Anwar on detail, depth and the prized skill of debating idiosyncrasies. And, although like Najib and Anwar he carries some serious baggage, he remains an intriguing character you can't quite decide to cheer or boo.

And therein lies the tantalising prospect of a showdown between two politicians from different generations, on opposing sides, but who probably have some admiration for one another.

A showdown between two men who probably suffer from delusions of grandeur, as many politicians do (and indeed must), and who both may have immense regrets about what might have been, if only.

And, who both might still reach the Putrajaya pinnacle every Malaysian politician dreams of and become prime minister. Try as their enemies might – and these two can count each other – they aren't dead fodder.

Terence Netto, when writing on this, said debates between politicians are notoriously hard to score. He is right. But he might also have mentioned that they are immensely entertaining for the Malaysian public, and if such spectacles also enlighten us about the merits of each party's policy positions, why not? What is political discourse if not public

engagement?

Before we head into silly season in Tenang – what with phantoms, handouts and angry speeches – let's hope these two men agree to a political event the whole public can look forward to. Over to you, Anwar. Take the kid on. And Terrence, no need to keep score, lah. The rakyat wins.

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