

All systems go for Anwar-Shabery debate
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The clock is ticking down to tomorrow night's debate between Information Minister Ahmad Shabery Cheek and PKR MCPX de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

anwar ibrahim ahmad shabery cheek debate poster 140708Barring a sudden pullout by either speaker or both, the event will proceed, said Rosli Ismail, editor of news website and organiser Agenda Daily.

"As far as we are concerned, everything is set and ready," he said when contacted.

Cable television channels Bernama TV (Astro 502) and Astro Awani (Astro 501), and terrestrial channel TV9 will air the debate 'live'.

TV9 is replacing TV3, which was initially slated to carry the telecast.

"This is only because TV3 is duty-bound to continue with programmes that have been slotted for that time," Rosli explained.

The debate entitled 'Form the government today, reduce fuel prices tomorrow' is scheduled to be held from 8pm at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur.

Rosli said he has been asked frequently if Anwar will show up, based on developments over the last few days.

parliament building police blockade 140708 11Over the weekend, the police obtained an injunction to bar Anwar and his supporters from being within 5km of the parliament building, on pain of being arrested on sight.

Anwar, meanwhile, has refused to comply with a police order to report for questioning in relation to a sodomy complaint against him by a former aide. Police have said they have several options prepared for handling this.

When contacted, Anwar's political coordinator Farhash Wafa Salvador quashed any doubts about his participation in the debate.

"The only question here is for Shabery's side - they are the ones who may back off," said Farhash.

Shabery's press secretary Junaidy Abdul Wahab has confirmed the minister's participation.

"Our side is ready," he said.

Taking the form of a presidential debate, the event will be moderated by Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka chairperson Johan Jaafar. With him will be two other panelists chosen by the debaters.

After a five-minute speech each, Shabery and Anwar will be questioned by the panelists. Following this, Shabery and Anwar will have a chance to interrogate each other.

They will then have several minutes to wrap up their arguments. The session is expected to last up to 90 minutes.

However, in a new development this evening, PKR said that the party had been informed that the debate has now been slashed to 60 minutes.

It said that given the live telecast would be done by private TV stations, the programme will be restricted to just one hour.

Moreover, the actual debate will take up 52 minutes of the hour while the other eight minutes will be commercials.

Interested parties

In a statement issued today, a group of civil society organisations said it was looking forward to listening the pros and cons of the price increase.

petrol price hike new price 040608They will monitor the analysis by both speakers on the quantum of price increase, relevance of subsidies and disbursement of oil revenue.

The issue is "too important to be left to government alone to decide", they said, but conceded it would be "foolhardy to expect the opposition alone to provide a counterweight in the shaping of public policy".

The statement was signed by Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, Centre for Policy Initiatives, Labour Resource Centre, Suara Rakyat Malaysia, Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation, and Group of Concerned Citizens, Residents Association Section 5, Petaling Jaya.

"Television with its wide national reach and impact can help in the dissemination of important information, facts and opinions on the subject that can enable our Malaysian citizenry to appraise the different positions held on this vital economic issue by the government and the opposition parties," the statement read.

"More importantly, it can stimulate public interest in issues of vital social and economic importance, and also help other key stakeholders play their proper role in the shaping of public policy through their analysis of the debate."

ahmad shabery cheekBernama quoted Shabery as saying that he had agreed to the 'live' telecast in order to prevent perceptions that the content has been edited or doctored.

He explained that RTM1 would not telecast the debate because he does not want to make use of the government television channel while he is the minister in charge.

Shabery expressed confidence that the people would be able to evaluate the rationale of the government's move to increase the fuel price.

"This (debate) can set a trend in the country. If we have differences in opinion, we debate. This is better than organising demonstrations, disturbing public order or staging shameful concerts," he added in obvious reference to tactics employed by dissenters.

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