

# 'Lim-Najib debate may be sidetracked'

> Ex-PM expected to use it to criticise govt, say analysts

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**PETALING JAYA:** The upcoming Lim-Najib debate, billed as a platform to address the issue of kleptocracy and integrity, may just serve as an opportunity to attack the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government.

Universiti Malaya socio-political analyst Prof Dr Awang Azman Pawi believes former prime

minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak will attempt to use the debate as a stage to criticise the government for its weaknesses, in line with current sentiments.

"If he does not succeed in steering the debate away from the agreed topics, he may just pull out of the fight," he added.

He feels what Najib might want is to ensure that the kleptocracy issue is not debated extensively.

On May 21, Najib and DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang agreed to the public face-off, to be staged at a date yet to be decided.

While Najib has openly agreed to Lim's proposal to discuss "how Malaysia became a global kleptocracy and how we can become a

leading nation of integrity," he said in a Facebook post later that "we need to (also) discuss other current topics" during the debate.

Lim has objected to that.

Awang Azman expects Najib to either ask for a postponement or call for its cancellation if he gets a sense that he will not be able to divert the debate away from the agreed agenda.

"He will most probably want to criticise the PH government for its weaknesses, in line with current public sentiments. But if he feels that it is not wise for him to do so, he will ask to postpone the debate or cancel it at the last minute."

Political analyst Khoo Kay Peng said a good moderator will help to ensure that neither

debater strays from the agreed topic. "The moderator will need to steer the debate back on track and prevent both parties from playing up racial and religious issues."

A social media user is of the view that Najib is not interested in the debate *per se*. "He sees it as an opportunity to reconnect with his still-formidable support base and even win some backing from fence-sitters," he said on an online news portal.

"Whether or not it is televised nationally, social media will ensure its gets the widest audience," he said. "Najib may even speak about his corruption and abuse of power charges to an audience that may not be well versed with court proceedings."