

# ANWAR ACCEPTS NAJIB'S DEBATE DARE

**Najib had said earlier he would debate PKR vee Rafizi only if Anwar joined in**

KUALA LUMPUR

**O**PPPOSITION leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has accepted a challenge by former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to debate on financially troubled Sapura Energy Bhd.

In a statement yesterday, Anwar said he is ready for the debate, challenging Najib to "enter the ring" if the latter dared.

This came after PKR vice-president Rafizi Ramli issued a debate challenge to Najib, which the latter accepted.

However, Najib said he would only participate in the debate if Rafizi's "boss", Anwar, joined too.

"I take note of the challenge issued by Najib. My stand is clear and has not changed since more than 10 years ago when I issued a similar (debate) challenge to him, which went unheeded.

"Now, he chooses to challenge me during early Ramadan, after failing to answer Rafizi's rebuttals on the issue of Sapura's 'bailout' at a time when poor and small traders are not cared for.

"I am ready to face (the challenge) and debate with Najib at any given time for the sake of the country and the people," he said.

Hours later, Najib replied to Anwar's challenge in the affirmative, saying that they should pick a date soon.

In a Facebook posting, Najib asked Anwar and Rafizi to organise the debate with the media if they wished it to be aired live.

"Game on. I agree to have a de-

bate with Anwar. Let's rock! Please contact my assistant to find the closest suitable date for all," he wrote.

Sapura Energy recently announced a loss of RM8.9 billion despite receiving large investments from state-owned Perbadanan Nasional Bhd (PNB), which holds a 40 per cent stake in the government-linked company (GLC).

Najib had then called on the government to intervene by either providing loan guarantees to Sapura Energy to solve its cash flow problems or direct Petronas or Khazanah Nasional Bhd to take over the firm.

He said it made sense since Petronas still required Sapura's services for its projects and had a better understanding of the sector.

However, Rafizi had countered that this would only benefit a "handful of elites", adding that



*Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim*



*Rafizi Ramli*

the money used to bail out the ailing oil and gas company could be put to better use to serve Malaysians.

Najib pointed out that neither of his ideas would put a strain on the government's yearly budget since there is no requirement for Putrajaya to provide a financial injection into Sapura.

"In fact, the ones who were using the people's money to save the elite was the Pakatan Harapan government when PNB injected RM2.7 billion in January 2019 to become Sapura's biggest shareholder, thus changing the company's (status) to GLC.

"Sapura was a private company when I was the prime minister, not a GLC."

To Rafizi's suggestion that the company's financial issues be resolved by its own management through a rationalisation plan,

Najib said it would not be practical.

Najib, however, said the Sapura rationalisation plan prepared by the new management involved a request to the bank to forgive a debt of RM7.6 billion as well as to sell the company's most strategic and valuable assets.

"If the banks agree, then the loss to the local banking system is up to RM7.6 billion, which is three times the loss of RM2.5 billion in the Genting HK case.

"This will have an impact on the dividends of the people's savings funds, as well as the local stock market.

"On the other hand, if the banks do not agree then Sapura will be declared bankrupt.

"More than 10,000 Sapura employees and its vendors will be affected, while the local oil and gas sector vendor ecosystem will collapse," Najib said.