

Najib accepts challenge

Ex-PM willing to debate with Azmin and Muhyiddin too

JOHOR BARU: The battle is to capture the votes in the 73 Felda settlements with political parties slugging it out, including openly calling for debates on issues faced by the settlers.

International Trade and Industries Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali fired the first salvo during a ceramah in Muar when he challenged former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to a debate on the issues before polling day.

Within hours, Najib, via a Facebook post, accepted the challenge but wanted to debate the matter not just with Azmin but also Perikatan Nasional chairman Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Many politicians from various political parties have been actively campaigning around these settlements in recent days, hoping to entice the more than 150,000 voters.

In his speech, Azmin said the debate was important to verify claims made by the Pekan MP during his campaigns that he and Umno had rescued Felda.

"The fact is Felda was destroyed under his administration. We have all the facts which clearly show the purchase of real estate overseas, which is currently under investigation by the authorities.

"The White Paper has proven the betrayal against Felda settlers is so obvious and that it was under his leadership the future of Felda settlers was crushed," he said.



Public talk: Azmin speaking at the ceramah in Muar. - Bernama

Azmin added that only through the debate would Felda settlers know the Perikatan government was the one which saved Felda and the settlers by agreeing in principle to dispose of RM8.3bil in settlers' loans.

"Previously, Felda's income was high and it could take care of the welfare of the settlers.

"However, FGV shares have gone down from RM4.55 to 65 sen," Azmin said, referring to Felda Global Ventures.

The minister is open to any form of debates, whether online or face-

to-face, and that it is up to Najib to accept his challenge.

Azmin, who was former economic affairs minister under the Pakatan Harapan government, tabled the White Paper in the Dewan Rakyat in April 2019.

The White Paper showed FGV spent RM3.3bil on investments and developments, which were not profitable such as the takeover of several companies with the agency incurring high debts and losses after being publicly listed in 2012 under Najib's administration.

Najib, in his posting, urged Azmin

to assist Muhyiddin with facts before the debate.

"I have no problems debating about Felda but I don't want to only debate Azmin. I am willing to take on both of them," he said.

Najib also posed six questions, including whether Muhyiddin and the Perikatan government had increased the price of palm oil.

The Barisan Nasional advisory board chairman said he had many revelations to dispel the allegations by Azmin and Muhyiddin during their speeches at Felda areas.

"Stop lying to the Felda settlers and the people.

"Let us debate. Muhyiddin need not worry as Azmin will help you. You can also ask about 1MDB's debts and I will prove once again that it did not use public funds," Najib said.

Separately, Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan, at an event in Pontian, came to Najib's defence and said government-linked companies such as Felda and Khazanah Nasional Bhd never sustained any losses under Barisan but got hit badly under the Pakatan administration.

"Just because they do not know how to manage the economy well, which resulted in the companies' shares falling, they are blaming Umno for their own shortcomings," he said.

Ahmad also brushed aside the debate, saying it was just a waste of time.