

**Anwar demands debate with Najib once more**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**January 14 , 2012**  
**By Yow Hong Chieh**

ALOR STAR, Jan 14 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has once again challenged the prime minister to debate him publicly over national policies and the country's direction.

The Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leader said an open debate between himself and Datuk Seri Najib Razak would let voters decide for themselves if the opposition pact's policies had merit.

The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition has criticised PR's alternative policies as populist and mere rhetoric.

"It's not Datuk Seri Najib who should decide if [PR policies] amount to rhetoric or are populist, neither the leadership of Pakatan Rakyat.

"I repeat my request for an open debate between myself and Datuk Seri Najib on the nation's policies," he told the PR convention today.

This is the third such challenge issued by PKR de facto leader to Najib, who has so far declined to go head-to-head with the former deputy prime minister.

Najib, who is Umno president, previously demurred by saying that political parties were more important than individuals in Malaysia's parliamentary democracy.

However, he also stressed that he would not have balked had he been required to face off against the charismatic Anwar in a presidential-style debate.

"I'm not afraid of Anwar Ibrahim," Najib has said to loud cheers from delegates at the close of the Selangor BN convention in September last year.

Anwar's call for an open debate has so far been answered only once in July 2008 by then-information minister, Datuk Ahmad Shabeery Cheek, an event broadcast live on national television.

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Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/anwar-demands-debate-with-najib-once-more/>