

**Khairy to take on Mat Sabu in 'communist' debate**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 — Khairy Jamaluddin has accepted a challenge to debate Mohamad Sabu on the PAS deputy president's recent controversial remarks on Malaya's pre-independence freedom fighters that some say undermine Umno's role in that process.

The Umno Youth chief, who has repeatedly derided Mohamad following a report in Utusan Malaysia that the latter had glorified the communists by saying that the 1950 Bukit Kepong tragedy was perpetrated by freedom fighters, said last night that he had accepted the invitation extended by the PAS-led Kelantan government.

"Done. Got invitation to rumble w/ Sabu. I'll be there," Khairy (picture) said on micro-blogging site Twitter.

A copy of the invitation sighted by The Malaysian Insider said that the debate will be held at the Balai Islam in Kota Baru at the end of the month.

Although the letter said that the Kelantan administration is still arranging for Mohamad to go up against Khairy, the Rembau MP told The Malaysian Insider that "only Sabu (will do) for me."

"No need to look for a neutral venue. Your lion's den. See you there, Mat Sabu," he added on Twitter.

However, it is unclear if this is the same debate proposed by PAS information chief Datuk Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man yesterday as Khairy said his invitation came directly from the Kelantan government.

Tuan Ibrahim had said that PAS will challenge Umno to a debate entitled "Who are the true fighters for independence" on the history of the Bukit Kepong tragedy which saw 25 killed 61 years ago.

He had continued PAS's defence of Muhammad Indera, who led the guerrilla assault on the Bukit Kepong police station, saying his party felt "sympathetic" to the Malay communist leader and his kinsmen, claiming they had been forced to endure wild accusations in "Umno's version of history" without being given room to defend themselves.

Umno's Utusan Malaysia had reported that Mohamad, popularly known as Mat Sabu, told a ceramah recently that those who attacked the Bukit Kepong police station during the pre-independence communist insurgency were "freedom fighters".

The maverick politician has since been accused of being a communist sympathiser by Umno leaders and sniped at daily in Utusan Malaysia despite denying that he had used the word "communism" during his speech.

But Umno appears determined to use Mohamad's statement to woo support from the Malay electorate, among whom communism remains a bogeyman, and last week announced a nationwide campaign to attack the PAS deputy president.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has accused PAS of glorifying the communists in hopes of reducing public gratitude towards Umno for defeating the British and achieving independence for Malaya.

But the former prime minister predicted the more experienced politicians in Pakatan Rakyat (PR) would not accept this strategy as it erodes support from those who struggled for independence.

PAS has made inroads in getting a major share of the Malay vote, which is now seen as split among Umno, PKR and the Islamist party since 1999, a year after Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sacked as deputy prime minister.

The controversy over PAS's support for the communists is seen as Umno's strategy to claw back support for a two-thirds parliamentary majority from the dominant Malay electorate in the next general election widely speculated to be called within a year.

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