

Najib: 'I'm not afraid of Anwar'
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SHAH ALAM, Sept 17 — Just two days after announcing a raft of radical law changes aimed at undercutting Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) reform platform, Datuk Seri Najib Razak has come out with fighting words aimed at Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The prime minister said today that while Malaysia was a parliamentary democracy where parties were more important than individuals, 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 said to loud cheers from delegates at the closing of the Selangor Barisan Nasional (BN) Convention at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic here.

On Thursday night, the prime minister announced that the Internal Security Act (ISA) along with three Emergency Declarations would be repealed when both the Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

Najib said new laws will be enacted in place of the ISA to protect the peace, harmony and security of the country.

He also announced that the government will replace mandatory annual printing and publishing permits with one-off permits that can be cancelled if regulations are flouted.

The Umno president said earlier today that no one else should take credit for the sweeping law reforms championed by BN.

In an apparent reference to PR claims that BN had lifted the reform ideas from the opposition's Buku Jingga manifesto, he said the decision to scrap the ISA was an extension of his promise to amend the controversial law when he took office in 2009.

"These are not the fruits of their struggle. This was a decision made by the Barisan Nasional government because we listened to Malaysians who want this change," he had told some 600 supporters at Universiti Teknologi Mara here.

Najib has gone on the offensive since his administration's harsh clampdown on the July 9 Bersih rally that soured public support for the government and drew heavy flak from the international community.

According to a recent Merdeka Centre poll, the prime minister's approval rating has fallen to 59 per cent in August from a high of 72 per cent in May last year, in part due to his handling of the rally for free elections.

The survey's respondents also raised concerns over rising cost of living due to accelerating inflation — which hit a two-year high of 3.5 per cent in June — with around one-third identifying it as the key problem the government must address.

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