

Anwar accepts Wikileaks' offer to debate Najib, RPK
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 22 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today he has accepted an offer from Wikileaks founder Julian Assange to debate Datuk Seri Najib Razak and maverick blogger Raja Petra Kamarudin.

Raja Petra had recently accused the opposition leader of forcing him out of an interview, leading Najib to accuse Anwar, who has repeatedly challenged the prime minister to a debate, of being inconsistent.

"Assange said he wants to organise the debate. It could be a three-cornered debate. I told him I agreed," Anwar (picture) told a press conference today.

The whistleblower website said in a press statement yesterday "we now extend our invitation to Mr Najib to debate Mr Raja Petra and Mr Ibrahim together, or in isolation."

"We have formally invited Prime Minister Najib Razak to discuss the future of Malaysia together with Mr Ibrahim, moderated by Mr Assange. If accepted, the filmed discussion will be seen by up to 600 million people and will be available online," it said.

A survey by Merdeka Center last month found that 54 per cent of voters in Peninsular Malaysia want to see regular debates between Najib and Anwar, with over three-quarters of young Malays backing a debate between the Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) chiefs.

In contrast, only 39 per cent of Malays — who make up the majority of the electorate — aged over 60 want to see Najib take on Anwar.

The former deputy prime minister has repeatedly challenged the PM to a public debate on national policies and the country's direction.

Umno president Najib has so far refused to take on PKR de facto leader Anwar in a debate.

But BN secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor appeared to open the door for such a debate, indicating last month the ruling coalition's "readiness" to meet any such challenge.

His PKR counterpart, Saifuddin Nasution, responded by saying he would reach out to the Putrajaya MP to arrange the clash between their party leaders.

Tengku Adnan then said Anwar should instead debate Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, the opposition leader's former aide who accused the Permatang Pauh MP of sodomising him.

Last month's clash between MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng drew a full house of 800 and was screened on Astro in Mandarin as well as with a Malay translation.

This followed a debate between PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin in London.

Anwar's previous calls for an open debate have so far been answered only once, in July 2008 by then-Information Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek, an event broadcast live on national television.

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