

Voters want Najib-Anwar debate, survey shows
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 5 — Most voters in peninsular Malaysia want to see regular debates between Datuk Seri Najib Razak and political rival Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, according to a recent poll.

Pollsters Merdeka Center found that 54 per cent of voters want the prime minister and opposition leader to go toe-to-toe, 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 wanted to see Najib take on Anwar.

“While some argue that such debates are unnecessary and ‘not a part of our culture’, the findings suggests that it will help voters make up their minds as 62 per cent of voters who have yet to decide which party to vote for, support the notion of having debates between the leader of the ruling and opposition coalitions,” Merdeka Center said in a press statement today.

Of the 1,022 registered voters polled between February 10 and 23, 59 per cent were Malay, 32 per cent Chinese and nine per cent Indian.

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, Datuk 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 has so far been answered only once, in July 2008 by then-information minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek, an event broadcast live on

national television.

According to the survey, topics voters want to see debated include the economy (17 per cent), national issues (nine per cent), public welfare and development (seven per cent each) and combating corruption (five per cent).

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