

**Najib says would debate with 'responsible' leaders**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 5 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak expressed today his readiness to participate in a debate but stressed his opponent must be "reasonable" and not prone to raising "conspiracy theories" to win an argument.

The prime minister reminded that the country's diversity could easily be turned into a "fatal weakness" if political leaders choose provocation over responsibility and fail to restrain themselves during such debates.

"And it worries me that far too many who say they want to lead Malaysia are unable to restrain themselves when they are engaged in debate," he said in his blog today, without naming any individual.

"For them, no story, no claim or outrageous theory, no matter how baseless or fact-free, is off-limits, even if it does massive damage to the country's reputation abroad and our domestic stability."

Najib added that "some in our country" could not resist the allure of raising conspiracy theories as such conjecture could absolve their promoters of responsibility for their own failures.

"Cannot win the argument or get your way? Then it is so much easier to complain that the system is fixed than it is to do the hard work of finding a better argument or humbly admitting one's error," he sniped, adding that conspiracy theories belong in "Jason Bourne movies" and not in rational political debates.

The federal opposition has repeatedly urged the prime minister to take on its leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in debate, arguing it would be the best platform for both men to lay out their ideas and policies to help Malaysians decide who to vote for.

The invitation was again raised recently when MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng faced off in a political debate on matters relating to the Chinese community.

Najib, however, is yet to accept the invitation. This has sparked off suggestions that the prime minister was afraid of criticism.

But he insisted today that he accepts dissenting views expressed against him, adding that he would be in the wrong career were he unable to handle them.

"That much I accept. I am happy to argue politics with any reasonable man or woman and appreciate Malaysian's lively political debate," Najib said.

According to a recent poll by Merdeka Center, most voters in the peninsula want to see

regular debates between the prime minister and political rival Anwar, suggesting that this would help them decide which party to vote for.

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