

PKR repeats invite for Anwar-Najib debate
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 6 — PKR today renewed its call for an Anwar-Najib debate, following the prime minister's statement yesterday that he was ready to argue politics with "reasonable" leaders.

In a statement, PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution told Datuk Seri Najib Razak there was no need to fear whether his opponent could keep his emotions in check during the debate as he should have faith in the public's ability to judge fairly.

"Najib expressed worry over his opponent's ability to speak based on facts and exercise emotional restraint.

"In truth, this worry should not exist if he is confident in the ability of Malaysians to make fair judgment," the Machang MP said.

Repeating his party's invitation to Najib, Saifuddin (picture) said the offer was in line with the "democratic spirit" the prime minister often speaks of.

He said it was unfortunate that despite the party's repeated requests, Najib was yet to respond to the invitation.

"PKR again urges Najib to accept this debate offer... unless he does not feel the issues of the economy, our Buku Jingga pledges and policies, good governance, rise in cost of living and the mismanagement of the country are important matters to be debated," he said.

"The decision lies in Najib's hands... whether he honestly wants to allow Malaysians to hear directly the policies of Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat debated within the democratic framework," he said.

Writing in his blog yesterday, Najib had expressed his readiness to participate in a debate but stressed his opponent must be "reasonable" and not given to raising "conspiracy theories" to win the argument.

The prime minister gave a reminder 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, 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 theories 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, saying 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.

According to a recent poll by Merdeka Center, most voters in the peninsula want to see regular debates between the prime minister and his political rival Anwar, suggesting that this would help them decide which party to vote for.

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