

Anwar wants BN vs Pakatan budget debate with Najib
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 28 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today renewed his debate challenge on Datuk Seri Najib Razak, this time suggesting to take on the country's number one by pitting Barisan Nasional's (BN) Budget 2013 to Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) alternative.

The opposition leader pointed out to how Najib had laced his Budget speech this evening with direct insults against PR and told the prime minister that if he was prepared to attack the opposition, he should do so in a debate.

"Debate me. If you are prepared to attack the opposition and the opposition leader, why can you not engage in a debate?"

"Confine it to economic policies... or the Budget. I am now reiterating my earlier proposal that we debate — that I debate Najib on the national Budget... PR versus BN's Budget," he told reporters after Najib tabled the government's Budget 2013 in Parliament this evening.

Anwar had earlier described BN's Budget handouts as mere "titbits" fed to the poor and middle income earners, pointing out that the move would do nothing to narrow the country's income gap.

The prime minister hopeful said the fresh round of cash handouts in Budget 2013 to middle- and lower-income Malaysians was proof that the government was merely concerned with its chances at the ballot boxes in the coming months.

"The announcements of handouts to general Malaysians is just a small dosage for the elections... but the basic structural problem of the country, where the rich cronies and their family members amass millions of dollars of profits through improper means — that is left intact," Anwar said.

In his Budget 2013 speech, Najib took an indirect swipe at Anwar when he pointed out that among the leaders of the federal opposition were "those who were trusted as leaders to manage the nation's wealth."

Anwar was finance minister under the Mahathir administration.

"We recognise that the BN government is not without fault, but what differentiates us from the other is that they do not have the courage to accept mistakes. On the other hand, they make excuses and find fault in others.

"Ultimately, parties that offer an alternative must be evaluated on their merit," Najib had said in his speech.

"The rakyat know them well. Among them, there are those who were trusted as leaders to manage the nation's wealth.

"If today they make promises, the rakyat must ask why is this leadership, while in power, did not take any action.

"When they had the opportunity; and did not implement what they promises, what guarantee is there that they will fulfil promises when they are in power?" he asked.

Najib pointed out that it was during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s when the country was "almost destroyed".

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