

Umno ready to meet Pas...even on TV Okay, let's debate: Dr M

SUBANG JAYA, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today announced Umno's readiness to meet the Pas challenge for public debate.

"We are even prepared to meet Pas leaders on television if they so desire," said the Umno president.

Umno will nominate its candidate for the debate, he said.

The Prime Minister was responding to newsmen after opening the *Kooperasi Usaha Bersatu (KUB)* meeting here.

A report in the latest issue of *Asiaweek* quoted Pas vice-president and Terengganu commissioner Haji

Hadi Awang as saying that Umno was unwilling to talk with Pas as it (Umno) was "too arrogant" and "too stubborn".

Dr Mahathir said: "Umno would like to debate with him (Haji Hadi) on TV, if he wants to... We will nominate our man."

Solving problems

But he made it clear that if Haji Hadi insisted on talking with him, it would be on topics that he (Dr Mahathir) was competent in.

"If he wants to talk to me on world economy, international affairs and other matters which I am knowledgeable in, okay I can discuss with him.

"But on other matters... we have people who can argue with him," he said.

On Pas' extremist activities, Dr Mahathir said the Government will ensure such activities did not disrupt the life of the nation.

On Pas accusations that Government was not doing enough towards Islamisation, Dr Mahathir said Pas was always saying that Umno was not doing something.

"Tell us, what is that something we are not doing. There is the Bank Islam, Islamic Insurance, Islamic University and Islamic values.

"But Pas has blinkers. It can only see what it wants to see."

Dr Mahathir also said the Government was studying the suggestion that political parties should not have religion in their party names.

He added he had received the memorandum from Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Rahim Thamby Chik who contended the use of Islam in the names of political parties can divide the Muslim community.

Dr Mahathir said Pas was confusing the people to the extent that "you must be a member of the party (Pas) before becoming a Muslim."

On the racial slur made by MP for Pasir Putih Wan Najib Wan Mohamad in Parliament recently, Dr Mahathir said he had already spoken to Wan Najib.

"He (Wan Najib) was sorry that people should react that way to what he had said. In the heat of a debate, people say all kinds of things," he said.

Dr Mahathir added he was willing to talk with Pas "on solving their problems but not about their confusion."

Asked whether he would debate Haji Hadi on Islam, Dr Mahathir said there was no reason to.

"The only people who can enlighten him are people who can argue with him on the same terms," he said.

On Pas accusations that Umno was a nationalistic party, Dr Mahathir pointed out that Pas was also a nationalistic party as it was only operating in Malaysia and confined to a single community.

"Pas has always been a nationalistic party. It is not an Islamic party... if it was an Islamic party it should be operating in Afghanistan, Lebanon, southern Russia and other areas where Muslims are oppressed."