

MAHATHIR-DEBATE

BM

KUALALUMPUR, SEPT. 15 (BERNAMA) --- UMNO IS READY TO DEBATE WITH PAS BUT ON ONLY ONE TOPIC, THE PAS ACCUSATION OF UMNO MEMBERS AS +KAFIRS+ (UNBELIEVERS), DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY.

UMNO COULD ARRANGE FOR LIVE TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE DEBATE TO BE HELD AT ANY TIME ONCE PAS STATED ITS AGREEMENT TO THIS, THE PRIME MINISTER ADDED.

+ALL THEY HAVE TO SAY IS THAT THEY ACCEPT UMNO'S SUGGESTION AND WE WILL ARRANGE FOR TELEVISION MALAYSIA TO PROVIDE LIVE COVERAGE OF THE EVENT,+ HE SAID.

+THIS IS TO GIVE ALL MALAYSIANS THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR FOR THEMSELVES PAS BELIEFS, THAT APPARENTLY, UMNO MEMBERS ARE KAFIRS AND SHEDDING THE BLOOD OF UMNO PEOPLE IS HALAL,+ HE TOLD REPORTERS AFTER CHAIRING A MEETING OF THE UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL AT THE PARTY'S HEADQUARTERS HERE.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS UMNO PRESIDENT, RECENTLY EXPRESSED UMNO'S READINESS TO DEBATE WITH PAS FOLLOWING AN +ASIAWEEK+ MAGAZINE INTERVIEW QUOTING PAS VICE-PRESIDENT HAJIHADI AWANG AS SAYING THE GOVERNMENT WAS ARROGANT AND PRIDEFUL DESPITE PAS OVERTURES TO HAVE DISCUSSIONS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS BETWEEN PAS AND UMNO.

HE CLARIFIED THAT HIS STAND WHEN RESPONDING TO THE P&S CHALLENGE FOR A DEBATE HAD ALWAYS BEEN THAT THE SUBJECT SHOULD BE CONFINED TO THE PAS ALLEGATION THAT UMNO MEMBERS WERE NOT ISLAMIC.

+WHEN I MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT ON THIS, I MEANT THAT UMNO WAS

PREPARED TO DEBATE WITH PAS, NOT I MYSELF.--I- AM THEREFORE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE REPORTS PUT OUT BY THE PRESS,+ HE ADDED.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID UMNO CHOSE THE PARTICULAR TOPIC BECAUSE THE ALLEGATION THAT UMNO WAS A KAFIR PARTY WAS A HEINOUS AND SERIOUS ACCUSATION AND THE PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW THE BASIS ON WHICH PAS MADE THE ACCUSATION.

+I AND EVERYONE ELSE KNOW THE ALLEGATION TO BE WRONG. WHAT WE WANT IS TO COMMIT THEM TO REPEATING THE ALLEGATION PUBLICLY ON TELEVISION.

+OTHER QUESTIONS DO NOT ARISE. THIS IS A SPECIFIC ISSUE IN WHICH PAS HAS SAID UMNO IS KAFIR: THEREFORE PROVE TO THE PEOPLE THAT UMNO IS KAFIR.+

HE SAID THE POINT WAS THAT THE PEOPLE SHOULD BE ENLIGHTENED FOR ALTHOUGH THEY NOW KNEW THE ALLEGATION TO BE FALSE, PAS STILL CONTINUED MAKING IT.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID IT HAD BEEN DECIDED THAT THE PANEL TAKING PART IN THE DEBATE COMPRISED SIX PEOPLE, THREE EACH FROM UMNO AND PAS, WITH THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN AGREED TO BY BOTH SIDES.

PAS COULD PUT UP LEADERS WITH CREDIBILITY AND STANDING WHILE UMNO WOULD ALSO PROPOSE PERSONALITIES WITH CREDIBILITY AS ITS TEAM.

+I MYSELF CAN DECIDE THE LEADERS TO REPRESENT UMNO BECAUSE WE HAVE PEOPLE WHO CAN ARGUE ON THE KAFIR ALLEGATION BY PAS.+

HE ALSO REJECTED THE ULAMAKS ASSOCIATION'S OFFER TO BE THE CONVENOR FOR THE DEBATE, SAYING HE DID NOT FACE ANY PROBLEM IN FINDING A NEUTRAL THIRD PARTY TO CONVENE THE DEBATE..

ASKED TO COMMENT ON THE CONDITIONS IMPOSED BY PAS FOR THE DEBATE INCLUDING THAT UMNO ELABORATE ON THE VERSES OF THE ALBAQARAH, HE SAID THIS WAS ONLY A PLOY BY PAS TO WRIGGLE OUT OF THE DEBATE,+ AS IF ONLY THE ALBAQARAH IS ISLAMIC.+

+THE ISSUE NOW IS THE PAS ALLEGATION OF UMNO PEOPLE BEING KAFIRS. THEY MUST THEREFORE SUBSTANTIATE THIS AND NOT IMPOSE CONDITIONS FOR WANTING THIS OR THAT LEADER TO TAKE PART IN THE DEBATE AS AN EXCUSE TO ESCAPE FROM IT.+

HE ALSO SAID TERENGGANU MENTERI BESAR DATUK AMARHAJI WAN MOKHTARAHMAD, WHO IS UMNO RELIGIOUS BUREAU CHAIRMAN, HAD INFORMED HIM OF HIS READINESS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEBATE.

ASKED WHETHER THE DEBATE WOULD RESOLVE UMNO-PAS DIFFERENCES, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE DEBATE WAS NOT A +FINAL SETTLEMENT+ BUT ONLY TO EXPOSE PAS ALLEGATIONS AGAINST UMNO.

+THIS IS NOT A STAGE PLAY WHICH PEOPLE WILL GATHER TO WATCH AND CLAP. THE PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW HOW UMNO MEMBERS ARE KAFIRS AS THIS IS A SERIOUS ACCUSATION.+ --MORE

MAHATHIR-DEBATE 5 KUALA LUMPUR

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR STRESSED THAT UMNO ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE TO DEBATE PAS BECAUSE THERE WAS A SPECIFIC ISSUE TO BE THRASHED OUT AND NOT BECAUSE IT WANTED PUBLICITY.

+WE ARE NOT SEEKING PUBLICITY BUT WANT ONLY TO DETERMINE THE TRUTH OF THE PAS ALLEGATION. PAS WANTS TO DEBATE TO ATTRACT ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES.

+IN FACT, THEY LOVE DEBATES SO THAT THEY CAN BRING ALONG PEOPLE TO SHOUT 'ALLAHUAKBAR' (GOD IS GREAT), NOT WITH THE INTENTION OF PRAISING GOD BUT TO WAKE NOISE,+ HE ADDED. --BERNAMA