

# Umno ready to debate kafir issue

By NURAINA SAMAD  
KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Umno is ready to debate with Pas on the latter's allegation that Umno and its members are "kafir" (infidel), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The debate will be limited to this issue.

The important thing is to debate on a specific issue which is the serious charge made against Umno that it is kafir. Pas will have to prove its allegation in front of the rakyat.

The basis of this allegation should be made known publicly, to the rakyat. We are ready to

Pas must show proof to people, says PM

that Umno is kafir is serious. We want to pin them down so that they repeat the charge in front of the people." Dr Mahathir said

Asked why Umno is now ready to take on Pas after Pas had on numerous occasions made the

herring... don't find an excuse to evade the debate."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said seven new members took their oaths before the council this morning.

The Supreme Council also approved the appointment of four deputy State liaison chiefs. They are Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen (Kerantan), Datuk Shahrir Samad (Johore), Datuk Wira Ahmad Nordin (Malacca) and Shamsuri Sulleh (Penang).

On the call by Malacca Umno to ban the use of the word "Islam" for names of political parties, Dr Mahathir said the Supreme Council had decided that it was not necessary to do so for the time being.

He also said the meeting did not discuss the amendments to the Umno constitution.

have the public debate anytime. We are not fixing a date. Pas has only to say that they accept and we will arrange for it to be televised live.

"We all know the allegations are baseless, but we need to tell this to the people," Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, told a Press conference after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting this morning.

"We have reached a stage where we cannot allow a political party to use its influence to weaken the faith of Muslims to an extent that they sometimes deviate from Islam."

Dr Mahathir cited as an example the allegation that only those who join Pas were Muslims.

"This is far from the Islamic teaching... as we know, Prophet Muhammad is not a Pas member, neither was Imam Ghazali or Imam Shafie and others..."

Dr Mahathir also said Pas was welcome to name three representatives it considered suitable and who had credibility. Umno will do likewise. A chairman will also be chosen.

He also said that Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, who is the Umno religious bureau chairman, had already expressed his wish to take part.

"This is not a drama. I know some people think it is... but the allegation

challenge, he said: "We now have a specific issue. They want a debate as a way to attract attention... we don't want to have it for this reason. We want to determine the truth of the matter."

"In fact we have in the past offered to have a debate. Now that we have an issue we will take them on. Pas has a different intention... they will bring as many of their people to witness the debate and these people will shout *Allahuakbar*... but they do this not to praise the greatness of God... only to drown the speakers' voices."

Asked whether Umno would respond to the condition suggested by Pas for the debate to touch on the reading and interpretation of the *Al Baqarah* and *Al Fatihah* verses of the Quran, Dr Mahathir said: "To each his own interpretation. As we all know, in Islam we have different *mazhabs* (schools of jurisprudence). What they want will bring us no solution. They have said we are kafirs... now prove it. Don't bring other matters... no red

The committee on the constitution was now studying the matter and will be submitting a report to the special committee set up to study Umno's selection and administrative process.

Also present at the Press conference were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam, who is Umno deputy president, and National and Rural Development Minister Datuk Sanusi Junid, who is Umno secretary-general.

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