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PM: Debate will dispel confusion

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PETALING JAYA, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today a debate on Malay rights between Umno and Pas should be held so that "the people will not be confused".

However, he said matters like how the debate should be handled needed to be looked into.

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on the proposed debate next month between Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and his counterpart from Pas, Mahfuz Omar.

Although both sides have agreed to the debate, several senior Umno and Pas leaders have expressed disagreement, with some describing it as a waste of time.

This included Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat who said the debate would not solve anything.

He had said the only way to resolve matters between Pas and Umno was to hold a debate between the two parties' top leaders.

Asked to respond to this, Dr Mahathir said there was no need for the matter to be debated by the parties' presidents as other people could help to shoulder the responsibility.

Meanwhile, Pas deputy president Abdul Hadi Awang said in Marang today that the proposed debate should proceed as planned.

He said it was a good move and the discussion could result in some important solutions to the problems and confusion faced by the Malays.

When asked on the Opposition using the debate to canvass for support, Dr Mahathir said they could try. "We can also do the same."

He was also asked on the proposal by Wanita Umno that Puteri Umno be opened to those below 25 instead of 35 as suggested by the party's supreme council.

Dr Mahathir said the matter would be discussed and Umno would decide on those who are suitable.

The Prime Minister was also asked on the Government's banning of video arcades and whether the decision would be reconsidered following appeals from operators.

"Before making a decision, the matter will be debated thoroughly by the Government.

"Although I was not in the country when the Cabinet chaired by Datuk Dollah (Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) made the decision, we will stick by it."

On the People's Progressive Party's demand for it to be given seats to contest in the next general election, Dr Mahathir said he would study the request.

On the decision by British Airways to suspend its services to Kuala Lumpur from London from April 1 next year, Dr Mahathir said he was not informed of this while he was in Britain.

The airline is resorting to this due to losses of about RM72 million a year for the past six years.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the possibility of American investments in Malaysia seeing a decrease due to better incentives offered by neighbouring countries.

He replied that Malaysia had to maintain its competitiveness.

On whether this would lead to additional incentives being offered, Dr Mahathir said requests from American investors would be studied to

determine those that could be met.
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