

Malays 'must fight as one'

By Mergawati Zulfa Kar and Sa'adah Elias

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, harbouring hopes that the proposed unity talks between Umno and PAS will take place, said the Malays must understand the need to fight as one and defend their special privileges.

They must also, as provided under the Constitution, uphold the position of Islam and Bahasa Melayu and the position of the Malay Rulers, he said.

The Umno president, explaining why Umno was not imposing any conditions to sit down with the opposition party, said the issue needed to be tackled by Malays as a group irrespective of which party they belonged to.

"We find the position of the Malays is being threatened overall. And we find that this threat is not getting the same response from the Malay political parties.

"We are all aware of the sta-

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tus of the Malays, their privileges as enshrined in the Constitution. Sometimes when these are being challenged, the Malays are not responding the way they should as Malays but instead they follow the stand of the (political) parties, when in fact the threats are not against their parties but the Malays," he told a press conference at his office yesterday.

The Prime Minister said the Malays should place greater importance on the race and not their parties.

"We are not asking for more, but we just want to defend what is in the Constitution which has been agreed to by all races.

"We feel that when we uphold this, it is our right. In a country like ours, the Malays must set aside their political differences to together defend our rights," he said.

Dr Mahathir also cited the Constitution's provisions making Islam the official religion

while allowing other religions to be practised.

"But if anyone questions the position of Islam as the official religion and wants the same status, this is *ultra vires* the Constitution. This is when all Malays should be united to defend the status of Islam," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he called the press conference, which was also attended by his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, to explain the confusion that arose following wide publicity on the proposed Malay talks and Umno's intention to meet PAS.

"We are not asking PAS to join Barisan Nasional. In politics we will always be at opposing ends. We need to have limited co-operation for this (defending the bumiputra privileges). We have no intention of uniting the Malays and then fighting the other races," he said.