

# Defend rights: PM

Umno wants unity talks to discuss Malay privileges, Islam and status of rulers

## Umno not asking PAS to merge, says PM

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"Umno has so far not put forward any conditions for the talks and this might have created some confusion among the people and PAS," he added.

On Islam, Mahathir said the constitution clearly states it is the country's official religion and other races are also allowed to practise their faiths.

"If any quarter questions Islam as the official religion, it is against the federal constitution and all Malays must defend this, but not all Malays are doing it.

"This is what Umno wanted to discuss with PAS and other Malays, not on politics. Umno also does not have the intention to unite the Malays in order to confront the other races.

"Umno is a friend to all other Barisan Nasional component parties and it will continue this cooperation as all the parties have their rights as well under the constitution.

"They (component parties) have not questioned the things stated in the constitution like Malay special privileges,

national language or Islam ... they accept them," he added.

Mahathir said that definitely Umno is opposed to PAS and Parti Keadilan Nasional in the political arena but "we believe they will join Umno in defending the provisions (pertaining to the Malays) in the constitution".

He reiterated that Umno has no intention to ask PAS to merge with it or to join Barisan Nasional.

Commenting on the pre-conditions set by PAS before talks could be held between him and PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor, Mahathir said: "If we can meet, at least I can make clarifications regarding them."

Asked what action will be taken by Umno if PAS insists on the pre-conditions, he said: "I think with the explanation that the Umno-PAS meeting involves only specific matters, maybe it will change its stand. I feel that common sense will prevail."

Khalil said the issue will be raised during the technical committee meeting of both parties. No date has been fixed.

Asked to comment on the filing of a suit by the Terengganu government today against the federal government and the national oil company Petronas over the oil royalty issue, Mahathir said that it is the right of the state government to do so and the law should take its course.

**PUTRAJAYA, Thurs:** Umno called for unity talks in order to discuss issues related to Malay interests, following attempts to question Malay special privileges.

Its president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that matters Umno wishes to discuss in its meeting with PAS are special rights of the Malays, the position of Islam and the national language, and the status of Malay rulers.

Political parties representing the Malays like Umno and PAS should defend what is provided for under the federal constitution, he said.

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"When this is questioned, the Malays do not respond in unison, instead it (response) varies based on political parties when the threat is not to the parties but to the community," he told a press conference.

"The reason Umno wants to discuss these topics with PAS is that there are attempts to challenge and question these things and this might be due to signs that the Malays are divided," the prime minister said.

He said he called the press conference to clear the air and state Umno's intentions in proposing unity talks. Also present were party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob.

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