

Details of Malay unity talks to be discussed

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Khalil directed to work out date and venue with PAS counterpart

By **T. Buvanes**
and **R. Manirajan**
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri: Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaacob has been directed to start discussions with his counterpart in PAS on the details of the proposed Malay unity talks.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the secretaries-general of the two parties will meet to discuss logistics like the title, date, venue and format of the discussions.

He said agreement will be mutual as "we will not dictate to them and they will not dictate to us".

Mahathir was speaking at a press conference here today after chairing a three-hour party supreme council meeting at the party headquarters here.

Asked whether this is a ploy by the Opposition which may withdraw at the last minute, Mahathir said he is confident that it is not.

"We are confident that they are genuine in wanting to hold talks with us (Umno) to forge Malay unity in the country," he added.

Mahathir also said he has received an official letter from Parti Keadilan Nasional declining the invitation to join the talks, giving the reason that it is a multi-racial political party and not a Malay-based party.

On the suggestion by PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor that talks on national unity be held instead of Malay

unity, Mahathir said priority should be given to Malay unity talks.

"We are not pushing aside national unity but many people are of the opinion that the disunity among the Malays is so bad that it is affecting national unity.

"Therefore, talks on Malay unity will start first, to be followed by discussions on

national integration at a later stage," he said.

On the arrangements for the talks, Mahathir said the supreme council members agreed that this matter should be handled by the party's political bureau.

"The bureau will consider the views of the supreme council members," he added.

Mahathir said the supreme council members were given the opportunity today to voice their ideas on the format, title, topic and scope of discussion.

"However, we did not make any decisions on our stand, except that we will approach the talks with an open mind," he added.

Mahathir also said that the decision to set up Puteri Umno was deferred because of time constraints.

Meanwhile, party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the meeting today also agreed to appoint Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen as chairman of the party's disciplinary committee.

Abdullah also said the meeting decided that all branch general meetings should start from March.

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