

# Umno is still keen

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**KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs:** Umno is willing to discuss any issue with PAS, including creating a conducive environment, but the opposition party must not make demands before Malay unity talks begin.

Its president, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said the talks will serve no purpose if PAS's demands are fulfilled even before the parties meet.

"PAS must first sit down and discuss with Umno as all these (demands) can be discussed during the talks.

"Umno believes the unity talks are important and good and we (Umno) have tried our best to accept PAS's demands, including having the talks on a national level, instead of just Malay unity.

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"Umno does not reject nor accept PAS's prerequisites as Malay unity is part of national unity," he said after chairing the party supreme council meeting.

Last Sunday, PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor announced the party's decision to postpone the proposed meeting slated for the next day, insisting that it should also deal with oil royalty payment to Terengganu, fre-

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quency of *Harakah's* publication and Umno's proposal to ban use of the term Islam for names of political parties.

Mahathir said Umno is willing to discuss issues such as Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim because what is important is the meeting as something good can be achieved.

He said the Malays and non-Malays want to see Umno and PAS close the political gap in order to stabilise the political situation.

"Umno is still willing to meet and (party secretary-general) Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, who is heading the technical committee (for the talks), will meet his PAS counterpart to see how it can

be held," he added.

Asked why Umno is still keen despite PAS's demands, Mahathir said this is not about Umno or PAS showing who is stronger.

"During the 1999 general election, Umno won 72 seats while PAS won 27, but it's not the question of who is strong. We feel the meeting will do a lot of good," he said.

The prime minister said he was only responding to a suggestion by a Universiti Malaya professor that Umno, PAS and Keadilan should meet and discuss Malay unity.

"So when reporters asked me, I said there should not be any problem in having Malay unity talks."

He said the meeting between Umno and PAS is not to

consolidate both parties "as we feel PAS, as an opposition, fulfils democratic demands".

"We (Umno) do not have the intention to consolidate and go against non-Malays."

In **KOTA BARU**, Bernama reports that PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor welcomes Mahathir's statement yesterday that Umno is studying the conditions imposed by PAS.

He said following the statement, it is appropriate that the two technical committees meet immediately to make a decision on the conditions.

"They (Umno) invite us (to the discussions on Malay unity), therefore we can impose conditions. We did not even call it conditions, only as requests for them to consider," he said.