

20 MAR 2001

Mahathir-PAS

MAHATHIR SAYS PAS IS TRYING TO AVOID MEETING UMNO

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Umno has no time limit in pursuing Malay unity talks with PAS although the opposition party is basically trying to avoid it by putting up various conditions.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that Umno had an open policy on this as it felt that the unity talks was very important.

"Basically, I think...I hate to say this because this will be another excuse for PAS not wanting to meet us. Basically, I think PAS does not want to meet us for the talks," he told a news conference after opening a seminar on "Integrity In Business - The Way Forward" at Nikko Hotel here.

He said this when asked to comment on the delay of the proposed talks and PAS' demand that Umno fulfil its three conditions first before the unity talks could take place.

PAS has agreed to proceed with the meeting of the technical committees of both parties on March 27 but wants Umno to meet all the three conditions it has set.

The three conditions are that oil royalty payment to the PAS-led Terengganu government be reinstated instead of the special payment channelled directly to the people by the federal government, that PAS' official organ "Harakah" be allowed to be published twice weekly as previously instead of twice monthly at present, and that Umno calls off its proposal for the ban of the use of the word Islam in the name of organisations including political parties.

Dr Mahathir said one of the reasons why PAS was avoiding the talks was because of their belief that they have the support of a majority of the Malay voters.

"Now the only thing is to get the Chinese votes. To get Chinese votes, PAS wants to make it out that Umno is anti-Chinese...that is why PAS wants to talk about national unity and we want to talk about Malay unity," he said.

He said the opposition party wanted to talk about national unity to show how they care about other races.

"They even put up in the Internet that if Umno Malays want to kill the Chinese, they will defend the Chinese. When did Umno talk about killing the Chinese.

"But they make it out as if we want to go and kill the Chinese, in the Internet and put it in the Harakah. Now they have erased it...you can't find it in the Internet anymore but we have downloaded that," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Umno had worked with the Chinese much longer than PAS, to an extent Umno members were labelled as "kafir" (infidels).

Despite this, Dr Mahathir said Umno was still willing to wait as long as it takes to meet PAS.

"In certain instances, we'll have to forget about our parties, give priority to common interest, Malay interest...defend what is enshrined in the constitution," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the four matters enshrined in the constitution which Umno wants to discuss with PAS concern the responsibility of all the Malays and not confined only to PAS, Umno or Keadilan.

He said that the talks could be held anywhere and would not take long.

"Yesterday, I met (PAS president) Datuk Fadzil Noor in parliament. I asked to have a talk with him but he refused. Five minutes would do but he

refused," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on Fadzil's statement in the press today that PAS-Umno relations which he claimed was "improving" since the meetings of their technical committees were held, would be affected if Umno allows the National Fatwa Council to proceed with efforts to have the word Islam in the name of organisations dropped.

"What do you expect, they are the opposition. But imagine in the Muslim community today, people are confused. PAS claims PAS is Islam, Islam is PAS...totally against the teachings of Islam," he said.

Dr Mahathir said because PAS used the word Islam, people believed it was true.

"If I were to vote for PAS, I'll go to heaven. That's what they claim. Why...because they have the word Islam in their party. Now people are confused as what is the religion of Islam," he said.

Fadzil issued the statement following reports that the council had submitted its proposal to the Conference of Rulers on the use of the word Islam in the name of political parties and other organisations in the country.

-- BERNAMA

AR AZZ RM