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Malay unity talks: Pas wants to widen discussion

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Pas today placed four issues that need to be discussed and highlighted during the proposed Umno-Pas unity talks.

It also proposed that the talks be referred to as National Unity Discussions or Perbincangan Perpaduan Nasional.

In announcing this, Pas secretary-general Nasharudin Mat Isa said the four issues concern the judicial system, democracy, the economy and Islam.

Nasharudin said these issues were not trivial. He said Pas was merely trying to solve the people's problems instead of obtaining political mileage from the talks.

Asked whether Pas would withdraw from the unity talks if Umno disagreed with the four issues, he said, "We might come to that."

Nasharuddin also expressed regret that the issues discussed during the first Umno-Pas technical committee meeting were made public by Umno.

"Both Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and I had agreed during the meeting that the issues we discussed should only be made known after the second technical committee meeting, and that no one should make any statements to the Press," he said at the party headquarters.

He said both parties had not agreed on the topic, date or even the agenda.

A letter informing Umno of the four issues had already been sent to Khalil today, he added.

On the Feb 19 date suggested for the unity talks, Nasharudin said it was subject to further deliberation.

"There were suggestions from both of us on the date for the unity talks," he said when asked whether the date was proposed by Pas.

He added that two dates were suggested by the Pas Central Working Committee.

When asked whether Pas was agreeable to Feb 19, he said: "We may want to decide on any date proposed by any of us.

"However, they have jumped the gun."

Meanwhile, Khalil, who was asked to comment on the four issues listed by Pas, said:

"I will listen to what the Pas technical committee has to say tomorrow.

"We will meet again as agreed, and tomorrow, we will determine the final agenda for the unity talks."

Khalil said this when met after a briefing session for Umno divisional secretaries at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The technical committees of Pas and Umno are scheduled to hold their second meeting tomorrow to iron out details of the unity talks.

Asked to identify Umno's five-member delegation which will accompany party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the talks, Khalil said:

"The party's political bureau will determine this. They are scheduled to meet on Saturday."

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, who was met after the briefing session, was asked whether it was "proper" for Pas to bring up the four issues during the talks.

"Umno has never set any issue or matters which should be brought up," he said.

"As said earlier by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, anything can be discussed.

"So it is up to the upcoming technical committee meeting to decide the

priority issues for discussion in the talks, the short and long-term issues."

Muhammad said preparations to discuss the issues should be made as early as possible, because as it was, "nobody knows what will actually be discussed".

"Both parties are still groping in the dark about this."

As such, Muhammad said he believed that any party could bring up suggested topics for discussion during the talks, but added that they would be arranged according to a mutually-agreed set of priorities.

Umno executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said the second meeting of the technical committee of the proposed unity talks would be held tomorrow.

"The meeting would be held at 10am tomorrow at Carcosa Sri Negara," he told reporters after attending a briefing with Umno Youth division secretaries at the Putra World Trade Centre.

But Nasharuddin when contacted by the New Straits Times said he was not aware of the meeting.

"We have not received any statement on the meeting. We are not aware of it."

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