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No pre-conditions for talks (HL)

Abdul Razak Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Umno's proposed "Malay unity" initiative took another step forward when the party's management and disciplinary committee decided to formally propose the matter to the supreme council for further discussion.

Committee chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it would submit proposals to the council on possible formats for full-scale discussions between leaders of Umno, Pas and Parti Keadilan Nasional. The next supreme council meeting is scheduled for Jan 12.

Abdullah, who is also Umno deputy president, today chaired the management and disciplinary committee meeting at party headquarters here. At a Press conference after the meeting, Abdullah said there would be no pre-conditions imposed on Pas and Keadilan to join the discussions.

"There are no conditions," Abdullah said, describing the proposed talks be held in the full spirit of musyawarah (discussion).

He added: "It is open in the sense that we will be going in without an agenda, without saying that `you have to agree to this and this'."

At this stage, the committee suggested that the proposed talks be confined to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Pas' Datuk Fadzil Noor and Keadilan's Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

In an immediate reaction, Fadzil said his party agreed in principle to the Malay unity talks with Umno and would not impose any pre-conditions.

"We agree on the principle to hold discussions in order to unite the Malays.

"We will also not place any pre-conditions, God willing," he said when contacted today.

Abdullah added that today's meeting also discussed logistical matters relating to the proposed musyawarah. They include possible dates and venues, and whether the discussions would be limited to the presidents of the three parties or to expand it to a summit, with each party represented by a delegation.

Today's meeting was also attended by vice-presidents Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Information chief Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and executive secretary Senator Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor.

"We will discuss the matter at a party meeting next week, on whether we will accept the suggested format and how this meeting will be conducted," Abdullah added.

The disciplinary and management committee discussed the issue of Malay unity at today's meeting following a request by Dr Mahathir who left for a brief visit to Myanmar this morning.

The matter was also discussed in view of Fadzil's recent comments that Umno should initiate the discussions.

"As such, Dr Mahathir felt it was good if the format was thought of now," said Abdullah.

Asked whether a special committee on Malay unity would be established to act as a "go-between" for the various parties, Abdullah said: "Let Malay unity be determined by leaders of the affected (political) parties."

Asked whether non-political Malay organisations would also be invited to the proposed discussions, Abdullah said that the committee would, at this point, suggest to the supreme council and Dr Mahathir that the meeting be

limited to leaders from Umno, Pas and Keadilan.

"If the leaders from these parties agree to widen the participation, it is up to them," he added.

Asked on offers by some quarters to act as an intermediary to realise the discussions, Abdullah said at present the party felt it was not needed.

"It is better for the leaders to meet face-to-face and hold a heart-to-heart discussion."

Khalil will contact the secretaries-general of Pas and Keadilan once proposals have been agreed upon by the Umno supreme council.

Asked whether a proposal would be submitted for the Youth wings of Umno, Pas and Keadilan to hold parallel discussions, Abdullah said there would not.

Other areas, such as content, will be determined at a later stage, he added.

On whether he agreed with comments by certain quarters that the discussions would only benefit Umno, Abdullah replied:

"It is the Malays that stand to benefit.

"That's the important thing. But please remember that Malay unity has always been the basis for national unity," he said.

Meanwhile, an aide to Dr Wan Azizah, when contacted today, said Dr Wan Azizah was likely to issue a Press statement next week after discussing with other Keadilan leaders.

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