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No time limit set to hold talks, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Pas is making excuses not to hold the Malay unity talks with Umno as it believes that it already has all the Malay votes it can get, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister added that even so, Umno remained open to the possibility of holding the talks and has not set any time limit.

"In the interest of Malays, we must put aside our parties and defend the constitutional rights of the Malays," he told reporters after opening a conference on "Integrity in Business: The Way Forward" at Nikko Hotel here.

The conference was organised by the Anti-Corruption Agency, International Trade and Industry Ministry, and Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry.

"I hate to say this because it will be yet another excuse for Pas not wanting to meet us, but I think Pas does not want to meet. It thinks it has all the Malay votes it can get.

"The only thing for Pas to do is to get the Chinese votes. Pas wants to make out that Umno is anti-Chinese," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Pas wanted to talk about national unity, as opposed to Malay unity, to show that they cared for other races.

He added that it went so far as to put up an article on the Internet which said that it would defend the Chinese if Umno Malays wanted to kill them.

"When did Umno talk about killing the Chinese?" he said, adding that Pas was trying to make itself a champion of the Chinese to win their votes.

Dr Mahathir said that to Pas, everything was political.

He said Umno had worked with the Chinese for much longer than Pas, to the point that Pas even accused it of being infidels.

"Of course, now they embrace (DAP national chairman Lim) Kit Siang," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it should not be difficult for Umno and Pas to meet because the agenda was to protect the position of the Malays as entrenched in the Constitution.

He said that he did meet Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor but only briefly yesterday at the opening of Parliament.

Dr Mahathir was asked if the talks had been jeopardised by the National Fatwa Council's recommendation to the Conference of Rulers that the word "Islam" be banned from the names of any organisation. This move was criticised by Fadzil who described the council as a tool of Umno.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims were confused because Pas equated itself to Islam. Because its name contained the word "Islam", some people might be convinced that it was equal to Islam.

He said Pas told the people that if they voted for Pas, they would go to heaven. He termed this as "moral corruption".

"Vote Pas and go to heaven. That is corruption when you offer something in return for something. So, don't say they are not involved in corruption," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the Opposition's criticism of the revised system of rotating the Chief Minister's post in Sabah.

He said the Opposition never supported anything the Government did and would criticise the rotation system as a bad one if it was maintained but would condemn the Government for not keeping its promise if it was

scrapped.

Dr Mahathir said if the Government was to listen to the Opposition, there would not be any development in Malaysia - "no Penang bridge, no North-South Expressway, no airport, no nothing".

Earlier in the dialogue at the conference, he said the Government had tried to instil Islamic values in its employees, but the religious teachers who conducted the courses were more interested in politics.

He said they had claimed that the Government was not Islamic and it was a sin not to vote for a particular party. He said even at kindergartens and schools, the religious teachers were more interested in politics. "They use the opportunity to get support for certain parties. Still, we will continue trying to instil Islamic values."

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