

23/02/2001

Umno presses on with talks (HL)

Abdul Razak Ahmad; Ainon Mohd

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Umno supreme council today reiterated its desire to see that the Malay unity talks with Pas take place despite the pre-conditions imposed.

Explaining the party's stand towards the pre-conditions set by Pas, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad invited Pas to bring up the issues in the unity talks.

"Although there are conditions imposed, Umno is still prepared to meet with Pas and discuss the matters raised such as Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and alleged wrongdoings in Government.

"The important thing is to meet. If we hold a meeting, then we can discuss," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after chairing the council meeting at the party headquarters here.

Saying that Umno "has tried its best to accept all of Pas' conditions," Dr Mahathir said even after Umno expressed willingness to discuss the four topics which Pas had brought up, the party was faced with fresh demands in the form of pre-conditions.

Apart from the four topics - which relate to the judiciary, federalism, religion and the economy - Pas placed several pre-conditions in order to create what it called a "conducive environment" for the talks to take place.

They include permitting the Pas party organ Harakah to publish twice weekly and re-instate petroleum royalties to the Terengganu Government.

Dr Mahathir said the matters were not under Umno's jurisdiction.

"Although Umno may be able to refer these matters to the Government, these pre-conditions decide upon matters before discussions are held," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that it would be useless to hold the talks when one of the parties had already received their demands.

"We are not saying that we are rejecting what Pas is demanding, but we want the meeting to be held."

Dr Mahathir re-iterated the party's invitation to meet with Pas.

"Although there could be no topic, let's just meet, because we might get something good from the meeting," he said.

Asked later on the possibility that Pas would remain adamant that their pre-conditions were met before they agreed to participate in the talks, Dr Mahathir said: "We pray that their hearts will open up for them to meet with us."

Dr Mahathir said the unity which Umno wanted to see as the outcome of the talks would pose no threat to non-Malays and to the relationship between Umno and its Barisan Nasional counterparts.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said Umno did not have any desire to create a Malay unity that would be used against the non-Bumiputeras.

"That is not our intention whatsoever. That is why we are willing to also discuss national unity, because we feel that national unity and Malay unity are both important."

Dr Mahathir dismissed speculation that the talks were meant as a tactical move to wipe out the Opposition as Umno also realised that there was a need for an Opposition. "We have no intention of wiping out the Opposition, because they are useful to check the Government if it does anything wrong. The planned Malay unity talks are not meant to combine Pas and Umno, because we still believe that Pas, as an Opposition party,

fulfils the requirements of democracy."  
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