

09 JAN 2001

Mahathir-PAS

UMNO PREPARED TO MEET EVEN WITH PAS ONLY, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Umno is prepared to meet with PAS only to discuss Malay unity even though Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan) has declined to participate in the Umno-PAS-Keadilan meeting.

According to the Umno president, the party had no problems meeting with PAS alone as it had no other intention apart from reaching a consensus on Malay unity.

He said what was important was that the Malays were not divided as this would be bad.

Asked on the proposed debate between Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and his PAS counterpart Mahfuz Omar, Dr Mahathir said the debate was not necessary as what was important now was the three-party meeting on Malay unity.

"Better to have the meeting (Umno-PAS-Keadilan) first, no need (for debate). Otherwise many things will crop up, will pose problems for us to achieve solidarity," he said at a press conference upon arriving at the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) Base, Subang today from a seven-day visit to Myanmar.

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had directed Hishammuddin to abort the proposed debate and this was agreed to by the Umno Youth head in order to give more focus on the meeting to discuss Malay unity.

However, Mahfuz is still keen on proceeding with the debate on the special rights and privileges of the Malays on grounds that it was earlier agreed to by Dr Mahathir while the PAS and Umno Youth movements had reached agreement on the choice of the moderator and format for the debate.

The Umno Management Committee meeting chaired by Abdullah recently proposed that Dr Mahathir held a meeting with PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor and Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan) president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail to discuss Malay solidarity.

The PAS Central Committee had agreed to such a meeting but wanted it to involve delegates and not merely a meeting between the presidents of the parties concerned.

PAS also wanted the scope for the discussion to be widened to include national interests and not merely confined to Malay unity while Keadilan refused to participate in the meeting on grounds that there was no split among the Malays, on the contrary the Malay support had shifted to the opposition.

On the PAS request that the scope be widened, Dr Mahathir said Umno wanted to speak only on Malay unity and did not state any condition or scope of discussion.

-- BERNAMA

AR AR AO