

25 FEB 2001
Mahathir-PAS
UMNO STILL WANTS TALKS WITH PAS, SAYS MAHATHIR

JOHOR BA HARU, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the party is still keen to hold talks with PAS on Malay unity despite the opposition party postponing it and insisting that Umno should meet its pre-conditions first.

"Well, we want to meet them, sit down and talk, even if there is no subject it doesn't matter, just sit down," he said today when asked on the fate of the talks, originally scheduled for last Monday, and if they could still be held.

Speaking to reporters after attending the Formula One Powerboat Malaysian Grand Prix here, Dr Mahathir said he had hoped to meet PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor in Alor Setar during the Hari Raya Haji celebration.

Dr Mahathir said he planned to pray at the new mosque in Kampung Alor Malai where Fadzil lives but the PAS leader would be away in Mekah for the Haj.

"For Raya prayers, I'll go there. The last time I went there, I met him. So I was hoping that when I go there during Hari Raya Haji, I'll meet him again but now he has decided to go off to Saudi Arabia to perform the Haj," said Dr Mahathir.

Muslims in Malaysia will celebrate Hari Raya Haji on March 6.

Asked if Fadzil was trying to avoid him, Dr Mahathir said: "I did not say that, you said that."

Dr Mahathir said Umno was all out to have the talks but PAS then raised fresh conditions after Umno agreed to PAS' demand that they discuss national unity instead and not Malay unity.

"They were hoping we would reject that condition but we did not. We are now waiting. Since we look forward to having the talks, we think of thousands of ways to have it materliased.

"Now, they are asking us to give in, practically to give money, this we cannot oblige. It is okay if they want to talk, but not to ask us to give this and that, perhaps then there is no need for the talks," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked whether PAS was trying to make it difficult for the disucssions to be held, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know, you can make your own conclusions. I do not wish to say anything."

On the eve of the Feb 19 talks, PAS decided to postpone it indefinitely and wanted three pre-conditions fulfilled first.

PAS firstly wanted Harakah, its official mouthpiece, to be allowed to print twice a week as before and not once a fortnight as currently.

Secondly, it insisted that the government reinstate the flow of petroluem royalty to Terengganu, currently under PAS rule, and thirdly to stop pushing for the removal of the term "Islam" from political party names.

-- BERNAMA
TCL RYN