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Umno will be at talks with open mind, set to discuss any issue

Ramlan Said; Ainon Mohd

PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - The Umno political bureau met today to prepare for Monday's unity talks with Pas, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said today.

"We hope the meeting will take place. While we are not putting any conditions to items to be brought up, we are willing to discuss whatever issues when the time comes."

Khalil, who heads the party's technical panel on the unity talks, maintained that Umno had agreed to discuss issues with Pas without any pre-conditions to ensure that the proposed talks take place as planned.

He said this when approached by reporters after attending Umno supreme council's political bureau meeting chaired by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Prime Minister's residence here.

Dr Mahathir, when met earlier at another function in Kuala Lumpur, said it was better for the talks to be held where "whatever issues could be discussed".

"It is not a matter of agreeing or not agreeing (to conditions). What's more important is for both parties to meet, then we can talk on whatever topic," he said when asked on conditions imposed by Pas.

When suggested that meeting without a fixed agenda could result in a "free-for-all" session, Dr Mahathir said: "We will see but (better) to meet first."

Also present at the one-and-a-half hour closed-door meeting were deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin and all the three vice-presidents, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Umno information chief Datuk Mustapa Mohamed was also present besides executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and religious advisor to the Prime Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Hamid Othman.

Asked to elaborate, Khalil said the political bureau had discussed the proposed talks at length and decided that there should not be any pre-set conditions to the talks.

Pas had wanted the talks to include issues concerning the judicial system, democracy, the economy and Islam as outlined by party secretary-general Nasharudin Mat Isa.

Khalil and Nasharudin met twice at the technical committee level to prepare for the talks.

The first technical committee meeting was on Feb 8 while the second was yesterday.

Pas' central committee is expected to meet tomorrow to discuss preparations for the Monday meeting.

Another member of the Umno political bureau, Muhammad, said Umno was flexible on matters to be discussed.

"In the name of unity of the Malays, we are willing to sit down and discuss matters with an open mind," he said.

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