

21 FEB 2001  
Mahathir-PAS  
UMNO STUDYING PARTY'S RESPONSE TO PAS' CONDITIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Umno is studying the conditions imposed by PAS relating to the proposed meeting between the two parties to discuss Malay unity.

"We are considering our response...we will give our response (to PAS' conditions) later," he told reporters after attending the presentation of the appointment letter to the new Yang DiPertua Negeri of Sarawak, Tun Abang Haji Muhammad Salahuddin Abang Beriang, at Istana Negara here.

"For us, we must have a meeting first. If there are conditions, we want to see what we can do," he said.

This is the first statement on the matter from the prime minister after PAS decided on last Sunday to postpone the meeting which was scheduled for the following day.

Dr Mahathir said PAS should have proceeded with the meeting as proposed.

"If it has anything to say, it should speak up then," he said.

Asked about the possibility of Umno setting a new date for the meeting, he said:

"It's not up to us. For us, we want it as soon as possible. But with these conditions, we want see what we are going to do," he said.

Last Sunday, PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor announced a postponement of the talks as decided by the party's central committee after a meeting.

He was quoted as saying that the meeting was postponed because the party had yet to receive feedback on a conducive atmosphere for the meeting and also that several technical matters had yet to be ironed out.

PAS wanted Umno to meet three conditions before the meeting could be held.

The conditions are to discuss the Terengganu oil royalty issue, the publication of its newspaper, Harakah, and its rejection of Umno's proposal for the word Islam to be dropped from the names of political parties.

Meanwhile, Umno Youth information chief Azimi Daim said PAS' decision to postpone the proposed talks was viewed as a ploy orchestrated by other parties,

"Umno Youth fears that if PAS' and Umno's sincere intention is thwarted by others, who are worried that unity will be achieved, it would have adverse repercussions on them," he said in a statement.

Umno Youth Chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said PAS seemed to have called off the unity talks simply because its Youth Chief, Mahfuz Omar was not in favour of the talks right from the beginning as it was carried away with Keadilan which did not agree to the meeting.

"PAS Youth has been carried away with Keadilan ...it does not reflect the view of all PAS members," Hishammuddin, who is also Youth and Sports Minister, told reporters at his office here.

When asked if there was a split in PAS following objection by PAS Youth to have the unity talks, he said, "It looks like it".

"Datuk Fadzil Noor had made a stance (to hold the talks) but PAS Youth did not want to do so and imposed conditions which gave rise to the impression that this group had an influence over PAS leadership.

Asked if he had any advice for Mahfuz, Hishammuddin said, "If he is so taken up with Keadilan, he should then join them."

-- BERNAMA  
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