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Umno, Pas to discuss format (HL)

Ashraf Abdullah; Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob has been directed to discuss the format and logistical aspects of the proposed Malay unity talks with his Pas counterpart Nasharuddin Mat Isa.

But the final say on the format of the meeting rests with Umno's political bureau, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Umno had received an official letter from Parti Keadilan Nasional rejecting its invitation for proposed Malay unity talks between Umno, Pas and Keadilan.

He said the letter from Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail stated that the party was of the opinion that there was no disunity among the Malays, but a mere shift of support from Umno to the Opposition.

Noting that Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor had said that the talks should be on national unity and not merely on Malays as the country was made up of various races, Dr Mahathir said Umno did not reject the idea, but felt that the talks should concentrate now on Malay unity.

"We want to discuss Malay unity first because disunity among Malays is glaring and can lead to problems," he said after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting at the party headquarters in Menara Dato Onn.

Dr Mahathir said the main reason for the talks was to unite the Malays, adding that Umno would go to the meeting with an open mind. However, he said, the agenda for the meeting could not be set at the moment as Umno had to consider Pas' views.

Similarly, he said, Umno would not be able to accept everything that Pas suggested, especially if the demands were unreasonable. He said all supreme council members presented their views on the proposed meeting between Umno and Pas.

Dr Mahathir said today's supreme council meeting was held solely to discuss the proposed talks on Malay unity. This came as a disappointment to the large number of reporters, including the foreign Press corps, which had anticipated the announcement of a new Cabinet line-up.

"Today's meeting has no connection with the reshuffle," he said, adding that he would announce it when he was ready.

On whether the reshuffle would also involve Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers, Dr Mahathir quipped: "I'll reshuffle the whole lot, I follow what the Press wants ... if they want changes in all States, I'll do it. I'll announce the reshuffle, when there is a reshuffle."

Later, Khalil said he would contact Nasharuddin soon.

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