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Umno to study conditions set by Pas

Abdul Razak Ahmad; Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Umno's political bureau has asked its technical committee to study the pre-conditions which Pas had set in order to create a "conducive environment" for the Malay unity talks to take place.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said this was part of the efforts to help maintain the momentum of the proposed talks between the two parties.

The decision was made by the bureau which met at the Prime Minister's residence in Putra Jaya this afternoon.

Khalil told reporters after the meeting: "We are prepared to wait, and the technical committee will continue their efforts.

"The committee has been asked to study Pas' conditions on the 'conducive environment' which they have requested for."

The two-hour meeting, which began about 2pm, was chaired by Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Khalil, who heads Umno's technical committee, said he briefed the meeting on Pas' pre-conditions.

The Umno-Pas technical committee has already met twice. After its first meeting on Feb 8, Feb 19 was set for the talks. A second meeting last Friday indicated that the talks were on although Pas secretary-general Nasharudin Mat Isa had, a day earlier, proposed four issues the party wanted to be highlighted in the talks. They relate to federalism, the economy, religion and the judiciary.

Yesterday, Pas decided to postpone the talks, with its president Datuk Fadzil Noor announcing pre-conditions which needed to be fulfilled in order to create a "more conducive environment" for the talks to happen.

The two main pre-conditions are restoring permission for Pas party organ, Harakah, to be published twice weekly from the current two times a month, and the Terengganu petroleum royalty issue.

Other ancillary pre-conditions which Fadzil outlined yesterday related to the use of the word "Islam" in Pas' name, and police action against Pas ceramah.

Khalil was asked on Umno's technical committee's stand when studying the pre-conditions.

He explained that some of them related to matters under the Government's jurisdiction.

"These talks are between two political parties, which are Umno and Pas, but some of the issues which Pas has brought up fall under the ambit of the Barisan Nasional Government.

"The two are not the same," said Khalil, adding that Umno must consult its Barisan Nasional partners regarding any party decision which related to the Government.

As such, Umno's technical committee had been asked to explain to Pas that the meeting was between Pas and Umno, not between Pas and the Government, according to a source present at the meeting.

Khalil said Umno would announce its stand on the pre-conditions during the party's next technical committee meeting.

The meeting was attended by Umno's political bureau members and other invited leaders.

Seen leaving Putrajaya after the meeting were several State Umno chiefs and supreme council members.

They included Negeri Sembilan Umno chief Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad,

Pahang Umno chief Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob, Malacca Umno chief Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam and Sabah Umno chief Datuk Seri Osu Sukam.

Others were Umno vice-presidents Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, along with Umno supreme council member Azalina Othman.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Terengganu Umno liaison committee deputy chairman Datuk Idris Jusoh were also seen.

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