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Umno-Pas talks on Malay unity to be held on Feb 19

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Malay unity talks between Umno and Pas will be held on Feb 19, with both parties represented by six-member delegations.

Announcing this today, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he would be in the talks.

"We see that Pas will be led by its president (Datuk Fadzil Noor), so we also want the same," he told a Press conference after chairing a three-hour Umno supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn.

The Prime Minister said the date and format of the talks were proposed by Pas and was agreed upon by the Umno supreme council which deliberated on the matter today.

Asked whether there would be any restriction to the agenda of the proposed talks, Dr Mahathir said they would be open to "all topics."

He added that national unity was also connected to Malay unity.

"We are prepared to discuss all matters," he said when asked on whether the agenda had been expanded to cover talks on national unity, instead of limiting it to just Malay unity.

Pas had earlier stressed that the talks should be on national unity instead of Malay unity, to which Umno said it had no objection.

The technical committees of both parties met last Thursday where several aspects of the talks were agreed upon.

Dr Mahathir said the other five Umno representatives would be decided by its political bureau.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether the decision to open the agenda meant it had accepted conditions reportedly set by Pas, including discussions on the Petronas oil royalty payments to Terengganu.

He replied Pas had not set any conditions and it would be an open discussion.

In an immediate response, Fadzil said that Pas representatives to the talks would be selected after the party's central working committee was briefed on the outcome of the Umno-Pas technical committee meeting by its secretary-general Nasharuddin Mat Isa.

Nasharuddin is now overseas and will only brief top Pas leaders on the outcome of the technical committee meeting when he returns.

"We welcome Umno's positive response to our proposals," he said in a telephone interview.

Asked whether it was true that Pas also wanted the Terengganu oil royalty issue to be included in the unity talks agenda, Fadzil said he was unaware of the matter as Nasharuddin has yet to brief him and other Pas leaders on the outcome of the technical committee meeting.

Dr Mahathir, when asked whether Umno would accept Parti Keadilan Nasional if it wanted to join the talks as the scope of discussion would also cover national unity, said: "No ... they said they are not a Malay-based party".

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, who was seated beside Dr Mahathir, said Keadilan had officially notified Umno that they did not want to participate in the talks.

Dr Mahathir said today's meeting also decided that Umno supreme council members should voice grievances related to party matters only through the council or the party headquarters.

"As for other party members, they should convey their grouses to the council members who can inform the council."

Asked whether it was a "gag order" to Umno members, he said it was not.  
"This is to prevent the Opposition from using the issues (raised by  
members) against the party," he said.

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