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Mahathir gives Nazri till noon tomorrow to arrange debate

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Dr Mahathir Mohamad has given Tourism and Culture Minister Nazri Abdul Aziz until noon tomorrow to arrange the debate between them. This is after the police declined to provide permission for the much anticipated debate to take place at Maktab Rendah Sains Mara (MRSM) in Kuala Kangsar, this Saturday. Speaking at a press conference in Putrajaya this afternoon, Mahathir said he had suggested that the debate be held in Padang Rengas, but it was Nazri who had chosen MRSM.

"I want the debate to go on unlike the 'Nothing to Hide' forum and I am prepared to debate on any issues raised by them, including the BMF scandal. I give Nazri until tomorrow afternoon to arrange it. I am not going there merely to meet him but to debate. If he wants to meet me, he can arrange an appointment," he added. Earlier, Nazri had criticised the police's decision to bar the debate, and vowed to be present at the venue on March 25 as scheduled.

It was also reported that the police today rejected the application for the debate to be held at MRSM, citing failures to comply with the Peaceful Assembly Act (PAA) by organising it at a school, as well as failing to give authorities a notice 10 days in advance.

Mahathir said the debate challenge was initially an attempt for prime minister Najib to speak but Nazri is just a minister in the government. Initially, he added Deputy Home Minister Nurjazlan Mohamed gave his approval but it seemed that the deputy minister cannot bypass the police even though the debate is held in a building.

"I am ready to debate and at any venue even in Shah Alam. Arrange this debate," he said, adding that as a former premier he has no power as he no longer is in the government or in the ruling party.

"If there is a new date I will come, even if it is not Nazri," he added. On the BMF matter, Mahathir described it as slander against him as it is not owned by the government but owned by a private entity, Bank Bumiputera, and action had been taken against the responsible person. There was an investigation, including a white paper report and it was debated in Parliament. There are no obstacles. It was not placed under the Official Secrets Act and we did not hide it as there is a white paper. It is unlike the OSA where you cannot speak, you try and hide the facts and hide the evidence, which is considered a crime," he said, in an obvious reference to Najib.

Under Najib, the prime minister had placed the 1MDB report by the auditor-general to be under the OSA and debates on the issue at the August house is limited.