

Khalil remains mum on reported meeting with Dr Mahathir

N34-3/7/2006

■ **By Tan Choe Choe,
Hamidah Atan and
M. Husairy Othman**
news@nst.com.my

MALACCA: He was the man of the moment, being identified as the mediator to clear the air between the Prime Minister and his predecessor.

But Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Malacca Tun Mohd Khalil Yaakob chose to stay mum on the matter yesterday, despite talk that he had met former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday.

The 90-minute meeting is said to have taken place at Dr Mahathir's residence at the Mines Resort in Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur, in the evening, but no details were forthcoming.

Reporters seeking answers from Khalil at a World Health Day function here yesterday drew a blank.

The Umno veteran declined to speak as he slid into the Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Malacca's official car — a white Rolls Royce — accompanied by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam.

"I don't know whether the reports are true or not... we did not talk about the matter at all," Ali said when asked to comment on whether Khalil was in-

deed the chosen mediator between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Dr Mahathir.

It was reported yesterday that Khalil was the Umno veteran referred to on Friday by Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin as taking on the task of healing the rift between the two leaders.

Although Zainuddin had declined to name the mediator, he had said that he was a person "loved by Dr Mahathir and respected by Abdullah".

Zainuddin also said that Dr Mahathir was agreeable to the idea of a mediator to clear the air on his relationship with Abdullah.

In **Putrajaya**, Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he would get more details from Zainuddin on the initiatives being made to resolve the differences between the two leaders.

Najib, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, said he did not know of the arrangement nor the report that Khalil is the mediator.

"I will get the information from him (Zainuddin). I will have to speak to him first," Najib said.

In **Ipoh**, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the mediation process should be expedited for

the sake of the party.

Such a meeting would enable both leaders to openly express their hearts and minds in a respectable manner, he said.

He also pointed out that although the differences between Abdullah and Dr Mahathir had not caused a rift in Umno, the issue should be addressed urgently.

"The whole issue must be resolved before it actually causes a split in the party," said Muhyiddin, who is also Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister.

He said the Prime Minister had adopted the correct approach in remaining silent despite stinging attacks from Dr Mahathir over the past few months.

"Pak Lah knows what he is doing and he has shown a lot of respect and goodwill by (remaining silent)," he said.

When asked whether Dr Mahathir had breached the party's code of ethics by openly criticising the Government, Muhyiddin declined to comment, saying that as a great leader, Dr Mahathir was fond of certain issues.

"I do not think he intended any malice or ill-will against the party when he raised those issues," he said.

Khalil is said to have met Dr Mahathir on Saturday.