

The Star - 2/7/2006



Khalil's the man

Malacca Governor to play peacemaker

KUALA LUMPUR: Umno veteran Tun Khalil Yaakob is expected to be the mediator to end the bitter spat between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Yang di-Pertua Negri of Malacca is said to have agreed to take on the job to mend fences between the two leaders.

Khalil, 68, a former Pahang menteri besar and Umno secretary-general, is said to be the best person to take up the task.

His resume includes being

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Person picked 'loved by Mahathir, respected by Pak Lah'

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Information Minister (1999-2004), Education Minister (1982-1984) and Barisan Nasional secretary-general (1999-2004).

Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin had suggested on Friday that an Umno veteran could mediate to heal the rift between Abdullah and Dr Mahathir.

He had met the two and both had agreed to a third person to mediate.

Zainuddin, however, declined to

name the mediator but said the veteran was "loved by Dr Mahathir and respected by Abdullah".

He said he met Dr Mahathir at his residence on Friday night, as a follow-up to an earlier meeting a few days ago, to hear what the former prime minister had to say. Dr Mahathir is scheduled to leave for Turkey and Greece today.

Yesterday, Zainuddin told *Sunday Star* that Dr Mahathir was receptive to the idea of a third person, adding that a mediator was the best option.

Zainuddin had also met Abdullah

before the Prime Minister flew off to Perth for a holiday with his family. He is due to return on July 14.

He said Abdullah was also receptive to the idea and had agreed to the person that he (Zainuddin) suggested, adding that he had also met the potential mediator.

Zainuddin said Malaysians of all races, in general, wanted the current political standoff to end.

"It is not just Umno members who want to see the two end their dispute, but all Malaysians who are concerned

about the political situation.

"They want to see government leaders focus their attention on the economy and not on political matters."

Zainuddin said initiatives to resolve the differences between the former and present prime ministers were in line with the spirit and wishes of Umno grassroots who were worried over the current development.

Several Umno leaders and divisions have also urged the Umno supreme council to resolve the differences between the two quickly and amicably

without any group taking advantage to worsen the situation.

It is understood that the idea of picking a mediator would be the first step to getting the two to patch up.

"After the harsh words by Dr Mahathir, including saying that Pak Lah was not his first-choice successor, a four-eyed meeting at this stage would not be possible," said one Umno veteran involved in the peace process.

"A mediator would be the best option, given the circumstances, to pave the way for the two to meet."