



Nazri: Umno will survive Perkasa
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INTERVIEW Umno has not always had an easy ride since its inception in 1946 as a nationalist movement for Malay sovereignty.

Since then, the oldest and biggest political party in the country has been battered by defections, splinters, political tsunamis and sordid accounts of corruption and money politics. Shaken but not stirred, Umno still manages to hold itself together.

Until now, that is.

Almost immediately after the 2008 general election in which the ruling BN coalition took a severe beating, there appeared to be a vacuum of the hardline, hail and brimstone approach to Malay interests.

Then came one man (read: Ibrahim Ali) who decided to revive what he thought was the old-school, fist-thumping, make-no-apologies sprint for Malay supremacy.

What began as a one-man-show became an almost free-for-all as Perkasa's membership grew, according to Ibrahim, from strength to strength, grabbing headlines with his often right-wing approach to Malay rights.

Pessimists are even saying that the NGO could tear the fabric of what holds BN together. So much so that Umno leaders are, whether privately or publicly, clamouring for damage control over the group's seemingly unstoppable antics.

Some political observers are claiming that Prime Minister Najib Razak is losing control over his own party, especially in light of claims that 60 percent of Perkasa's 200,000 members belong to Umno as well.

"That's what you get for believing in freedom of expression," said Minister in Prime Minister's Department Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz.

The minister however thinks he knows how to put a stop to Perkasa.

In the second part of an exclusive interview with *Malaysiakini*, Nazri - an Umno supreme council member - does not mince his words at his displeasure with the NGO and throws it 'a gauntlet.' 'Joining politics their death knell'



A lawyer by profession and a self-proclaimed believer in freedom of expression, Nazri is not too fussed with claims that a majority of Perkasa members are from his own party.

"As I've said many times, Perkasa is an NGO. Umno members are free to support Perkasa," he said.

"That's why I said I want Perkasa to register as a political party. Then we'll know if members of Umno really support it.

This is because you would really have to make a choice.

"But let me tell you, if they register, that'll be their death knell. They'll just *mati* (die)," he said.

He recounted past turmoil that could have sunk Umno but didn't, such as the withdrawal of the Islamist leaders to form PAS, the Semangat 46 splinter party led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and the sacking of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim that saw an exodus of Umno members to become PKR pioneers.

"We have been battered left and right but we are still here. You think Perkasa will do better than Semangat 46, PKR or PAS?" he asked.

Mahathir factor

It is notable that former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad (*below*) gives Perkasa a glowing vote of confidence and even graced their events a number of times.

It almost suggests a growing undercurrent against the Najib administration, considering the support that Mahathir still commands.

Nazri ,however, writes it off as perception, saying that the former premier's support may not amount to much after all.

"We are a country of the East. We still have respect for former leaders who have given their lives to the country. So I think the perceived support is only out of respect (for Mahathir). Of course you have mavericks like me who will say it as it is," he said.



"(Mahathir) left and came back. It means that we are strong, that's all. He wouldn't have come back if we're not strong," Nazri added.

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