

**Perkasa not so extreme: Najib
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said Malay rights group Perkasa is "not so extreme" that it cannot be accommodated by the Umno-led government.

In an interview aired on satellite news channel Al Jazeera last night, Najib spoke on behalf of Perkasa in saying the non-governmental organisation was "by and large supportive of Umno."

Najib, who is also Umno president and ruling coalition BN's chairperson, said Perkasa backs the party as it is "the only vehicle" that can promote Malay interests" and "hold this country together".

Between asserting that his New Economic Model (NEM) policy would be inclusive of all ethnic communities while denying that the "special rights" for bumiputeras would be taken away, Najib said it is up to the government to engage with Malay rights groups to persuade them that such privileges would not cease.

'Supportive of Umno'

"Perkasa is not so extreme, if you listen to them carefully. They can shout about Malay rights as long as they are not extreme in their views, and you know, to the extent that we can accommodate Perkasa. And we can accommodate also the non-Malays as well," Najib told Al Jazeera's Fauziah Ibrahim.

However, Najib stressed that at the same time non-Malays will not be ignored.

"I do engage the non-Malay groups as well, so as prime minister, I've always said I'm prime minister for all Malaysians," he added.

Asked about Perkasa as being among the Malay groups that are threatening to withdraw support from Umno in the next election unless affirmative action for the community is maintained, Najib said Perkasa's support for Umno is assured.

"They are by and large supportive of Umno and they believe that Umno is the only vehicle that can really, not only promote Malay interest but really hold this country together.

"I think Umno is a strong party. Umno is well-established. Umno can deal with the emergence of Perkasa as well as other groups as well," said Najib.

Perkasa, led by Independent Pasir Mas parliamentarian Ibrahim Ali and made up of a coterie of Malay business and silat groups, at its annual general meeting last week warned the government against bowing to Chinese groups' blackmail into sacrificing bumiputera rights for electoral votes.

In a resolution, Perkasa said it believed many Chinese felt they could be kingmakers in determining whether the ruling BN or the opposition Pakatan Rakyat wins in next general elections.

"Cognisant of this situation, Chinese NGOs such as Ziong Dong and (Associated) Chinese Chambers (of Commerce) have used all available opportunities to pressure the government

with all kinds of demands that benefit the Chinese community.

"In the event that their demands are not met, they would threaten to vote for Pakatan Rakyat, which is willing to surrender everything to the Chinese community," the resolution read.

The resolution cited the raising of scholarship quotas to the Chinese community and the RM1.8 billion allocation for Chinese schools.

At the same meeting, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad also lent his influence to the group and urged Najib to listen to Malay-based NGOs like Perkasa as they represent a significant part of the Malay vote.

'Not a zero-sum game'

Najib in his interview acknowledged that in a system of "unbridled" market capitalism, socio-economic policies without "some degree of affirmative action" for bumiputeras would threaten "political and racial" stability.

"And that's going to be quite catastrophic for our society because our society is predicated on stability. I think stability is a bed rock in terms of where Malaysia has come from. In the past, we went through a very painful experience."

He denied, however, that the management of conflicting interests was a "zero-sum game" in that the promotion of Malay interests would not be at the expense of non-Malays.

NONE "It's not a zero-sum game because if you promote the interest of the Malays, it's not at the exclusion of the non-Malays. I think there's enough resources for us to help everyone in this country.

"And I think, I'm confident in fact, you know with the policies based on the spirit and philosophy of 1Malaysia, that everyone will have a rightful place under the Malaysian sun."

In an interview aired on the same channel, meanwhile, Ibrahim (right) was recorded to have exploded in furious expletives when asked about criticisms against the NEM's predecessor, the New Economic Policy (NEP), which had favoured Malays.

In the two-minute clip, Ibrahim blew up and said heatedly; "If these people say that they are second-class citizens, don't talk s**t! Don't talk s**t! I repeat three times, don't talk s**t!"

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