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Dr M's 'racist remarks' draw flak

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malays have every reason to fight for their rights, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as non-Bumiputera groups again lamented over the former prime minister's apparently racist line.

He claimed Malaysia was the only nation in the world where the main ethnic group had admitted other races and endowed them with rights.

"We (the Malays) are not the type to protest and have accepted those who came to the country.

"We even accorded them rights unlike other countries," he said at a talk titled "The Future of Malaysian Malays" organised by Warisan Pekar, a non-governmental organisation, in Teluk Intan on Saturday.

Some 2,000 people attended the hour-long event.

In an immediate response, Gerakan secretary-general Datuk Seri Chia Kwang Chye said national unity was crucial to meeting the challenges of the present day.

"It's time we thought like Malaysians and as Bangsa Malaysia to work together to forge a united country and face future challenges as one.

"Global challenges like the fuel and food crisis are best tackled and handled together. In light of these challenges, it is inappropriate to start questioning each other's contributions and rights.

"It is more important to treat everyone as Malaysians, regardless of race, in order to contribute effectively to the country's development."

Dr Mahathir expressed sadness at being termed a racist each time he spoke on the rights of the Malays.

"When they speak of their rights, people say it is all right as we live in a multiracial country.

"I am extremely sad but we have every right to speak in defence of the Malays," he said.

Malaysian Associated Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry president Datuk Kenneth Eswaran said the special rights of the Malays had never been questioned, at least in Barisan Nasional.

"There is no basis whatsoever to Dr Mahathir's claims. The Indian community, at



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Gerakan secretary-general*



There is no basis whatsoever to Dr Mahathir's claims. The Indian community has never questioned the economic rights of the Malays.

*Datuk Kenneth Eswaran
Malaysian Associated Indian
Chambers of Commerce
and Industry president*

least those in BN, has never questioned the economic rights of the Malays.

"Dr Mahathir should know

this better as he was part of the system at one time," he said.

The former prime minister

also demolished the notion of a Bangsa Malaysia, which he had proposed.

"We have failed to create a

Malaysian race and must accept the fact that we are made up of different races and religions.

"Malaysia is not like other countries. We have come up with policies to help the Malays without sidelining the interests of other races.

"The New Economic Policy was designed not to deny others of their rights but to improve the economic status of the Malays."

He said peace and harmony in the country could only be achieved when the economic divide between the races was narrowed.

"If the gap is too big, it might lead to dissatisfaction by certain groups and to untoward incidents like the May 13 riots in 1969."

MCA vice-president Datuk Seri Dr Fong Chan Onn said: "Now is not the time to distinguish between Malays and non-Malays.

"We are first and foremost Malaysians and we (MCA) articulate our views as Malaysians.

"As MCA leaders, we are responsible for everyone and are constantly aware of the sensitivities of Malaysians and the multiracial context we live in," he said.