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'Umno needs Perkasa'



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad warns against alienating Perkasa members

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that Umno cannot afford to distance itself from Perkasa as it represented a large number of Malay voters.

The former prime minister said Umno could lose seats in the next general election if it chose to distance itself from the Malay rights group.

"Perkasa members are Umno supporters. It would not help Umno's cause to turn them away," he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

He was commenting on Wednesday's announcement by Umno sec-

retary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor that Umno would not support Perkasa or its president, Datuk Ibrahim Ali, at the next general election.

On Tengku Adnan's comment that any support by Umno for Perkasa would erode support for Barisan Nasional among non-Malays, Dr Mahathir said it was more important for Umno to worry about losing Malay voters.

"The non-Malays are unlikely to support Umno anyway. Right now, Umno and BN should be careful not to discount those who support them."

He said Umno could not afford to

alienate itself from Malay groups such as Perkasa, which were formed because they believed Umno was not doing enough to protect Malay interests.

"Perkasa isn't the only group out there. There are many Malay non-governmental organisations which exist because they feel Umno is not looking after their rights and interests.

"In my time, we could afford to ignore small groups like these. In fact, there weren't any small groups — they were all Umno supporters.

"But now Umno is weak and needs the help of these organisations which comprise a significant number of Umno and BN voters."