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Mahathir taken to task

> Umno and BN need support of all Malaysians, say leaders

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PET AUNG JAYA: Several Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders took former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to task yesterday and said Umno needs the support of all Malaysians, and not just the Malays, to fare well in the next general election.

They said BN will lose public support if it associates itself with extremist groups.

Gerakan Youth deputy chief Oh Tong Keong said Mahathir's view that Umno should not disassociate itself with Malay rights movement Perkasa was tantamount to asking Umno to "abandon its allies in BN and its loyal supporters of all races and religions that stood by Umno all these years".

"If Umno has to embrace a group like Perkasa for fear of losing the Malays' support, as suggested by Tun Dr Mahathir, and other ethnic-based political parties from both sides of the political divide follow suit, then, where is Malaysia? How about us, Malaysians?" he asked in a statement.

Oh, who is also the Penang Gerakan Youth chief, said Mahathir's comments have ignored the wishes and aspirations of most Malaysians who do not agree with extremist groups.

He said Mahathir's views and perception are "outdated" because in today's globalised world, the majority of the people, especially the younger generation, "do not do things or think based on racial lines but on broader principles like social justice and fairness".

"The spirit of goodwill,

friendship and mutual respect of all Malaysians should be allowed to prevail," he said.

"Unfortunately, Tun Dr Mahathir's latest statement has sent out a very disturbing message. Gerakan Youth is confident that this spirit is also shared by leaders and members of the political divide. We hope the spirit will not be destroyed by some selfish groups which have their own political agenda."

In a separate statement, MCA secretary-general Datuk Serf Kong Cho Ha said BN thrives on the support given by every race and not only by the Malays.

"BN will not be able to win the public's support through association with extremist or xenophobic groups as it needs the mandate from all the ethnic groups in Malaysia. Any form of linkage with extremist or xenophobic groups will incur a loss in vote counts against BN," he said.

Kong, who is also the transport minister, said that while MCA welcomes the comments by various Umno leaders in distancing themselves from the Malay rights group, it regrets the comments made by a "prominent public figure".

"We regret to read the remarks by a prominent public figure who claims that Umno needs backing from Perkasa if it does not want to risk Barisan Nasional losing support," he said, without naming Mahathir.

"BN does not consist of only one political party but is an alliance which comprises various political parties representing all the ethnic groups in Malaysia."

Kong said it has always been the case that grievances or issues



affecting the public are resolved through BN's multiracial spirit of consensus.

"As a responsible political alliance which prioritises the country's harmony, peace and security above all else, BN will ensure that the future of Malaysia will not be sacrificed through the regressive and flawed racial outlook of Perkasa," he said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz told *theSun* Mahathir should adhere to his "own advice he gave when he was in the cabinet".

Referring to Mahathir's defeat in

the 1969 general election in Kota Star Selatan to PAS candidate Yusoff Rawa after Mahathir reportedly declared he did not need Chinese votes to win, Nazri said: "He reminded us all the time of his experience, (saying that) we need to get votes from everyone. When he was the prime minister, he advised us that in this country no one race can form a government on its own. It has to be a government of all races, even though the Malays are a majority.

"I suppose he's saying it (differently) because he is not contesting now, but for people like me, we know what it means to get votes from all Malaysians and not only from the Malays."

Sabah BN secretary Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan told *theSun* "Umno can handle Malay interests well enough".

He said Perkasa is irrelevant in Sabah as the state BN is strong and can directly discuss issues with its component parties.

The Kota Belud MP also feels Umno should disassociate itself from Perkasa but added that Perkasa has the right to exist as an NGO.

"They (Perkasa) are not asking for trouble but to be fair to (Datuk) Ibrahim Ali (the Perkasa president), he believes that his interpretation of the Constitution is right. To be honest, there is nothing wrong with that as people have different interpretations," Abdul Rahman said.