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Dr M backs plan for merger of BN Chinese parties

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ALOR STAR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is in favour of the proposed merger of three Barisan Nasional's Chinese-dominant parties — MCA, Gerakan and the Sarawak United Peoples' Party — into a single entity.

The former prime minister said the move would help unite the leaders and members of the three parties which in turn would strengthen the BN coalition as a whole.

He said the merger would enable the three parties to speak as one voice and reduce overlapping of demands and interests among BN component parties.

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said the Malays had Umno as one single party in BN and it should be the same case with Chinese-based parties.

"The merger could work to BN's advantage as the coalition is trying to find solutions to regain the trust and support from the people especially from the Chinese community.

"By becoming a single entity, the members and leaders from the three component parties could iron out their differences and work together as one," he said after his visit to Pekan Rabu here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Gerakan acting-president Datuk Chang Ko Youn's announcement that the three Chinese majority parties in BN would discuss the possibility of merging into a single entity after the respective par-

ty's election.

Elaborating on the merger, Chang said the move was crucial to balance the Malaysian multi-racial political landscape.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that the political imbalance, which had led to the "Chinese tsunami" in the 13th General Election, had created some uneasiness among certain quarters in Malaysia.

In **Kuala Lumpur**, MCA Youth chief Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong hinted that the proposed merger could not be realised immediately.

He said similar to MCA, Gerakan and SUPP would be busy making preparations for their party polls.

Wee, however, said a multilateral discussion should be conducted among leaders from the three parties to check if the proposal could help to lure support for BN from the Chinese community.

"At present, there are only talks over the merger. There is no need to rush as we need to study the proposal carefully.

"A discussion needs to be carried out to find out if the merger will serve to our advantage or otherwise," he said yesterday.

He said for MCA, the merger could only be discussed among party members during the party's annual general meeting, expected to be held this December.

Wee said personally, it was too early for him to make any judgment over the merger.