

Newspaper	THE STAR
Date	13 FEB 2015

Dr M: Moderates must speak up and be heard

The Star
-13/2/2015

Former premier says group must make presence felt and keep extremists in check

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KUALA LUMPUR: It is even more important now than ever for moderates to speak out, said former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (pic).

Speaking to a crowd of nearly 1,000 people, yesterday, Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister said that while there were many moderates in the country, they "don't dare to say anything against (the extremists)" to avoid becoming targets of the extremists.

"The majority of moderates just keep quiet.

"If they don't rebut extremists, you will let them become even more powerful," he said in his speech, pointing out that in Malaysia there were three major racial groups and therefore three groups of extremists.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a forum organised by the Centre for a Better Tomorrow and the Centre for Public Policy Studies.

He said that if extremists were left unchecked, they would think they were in the right.

Dr Mahathir praised the group of 25 prominent Malays for calling for a rational discussion on Islamic laws, saying that it was a step in the right direction.

"People were making all kinds of things into *fatwas*. Recently, near Christmas, someone said you can't say 'Merry Christmas'.

"Then of course you have to ban the Chinese from saying 'Selamat Hari Raya'. You can't say that or you'll become a Muslim," he quipped.

"It's got nothing to do with Islam."

Dr Mahathir said that moderates must begin



to speak up and make their presence felt by the community.

"When you don't say anything, it appears as though you agree and the extremists will get even worse."

Dr Mahathir said that during his time in office he knew that despite his lack of popularity with some, "the moderates would support me".

During his speech, Dr Mahathir also touched on extremist Malay rights group Perkasa, saying that his support for them was only if it did not act in an extremist fashion.

"Where Perkasa fights against extremist voices where Umno has failed, I will support it.

"But if they fight for extremist ideals, I will not support it."