

MCA: Be more open-minded

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Dr M comes under fire for remarks on usage of chopsticks

PETALING JAYA: The outdated worldview and narrow thinking expressed by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his new book cannot be allowed to undermine Malaysia's race relations, says Datuk Chong Sin Woon.

The MCA secretary-general urged all Malaysians not to be easily swayed by the words of the former premier.

"Instead, commit ourselves to be more open-minded, progressive and accepting of others' cultures so that we can build a more united Malaysia together.

"We do not want to see Malaysia's precious multiracial ties get strained because of his new book and his remarks, which propagates racial division and extremism," he said in a statement yesterday.

Chong noted that Malaysians should discuss nation-building from a progressive and diverse perspective.

In his new book that was launched on Sunday, Dr Mahathir had referred to the continued use of chopsticks by the Chinese community here.

He had said: "The Chinese eat



Voice of reason: Chong (left) and Tan say now is the time for unity and understanding of all races and cultures in the country.

with chopsticks, they don't eat with their hands. They have not adopted the Malaysian way of eating food.

"They retained the chopstick, which is an identity from China, not Malaysia, and many other things," he reportedly said.

Chong said MCA has been adhering to the teachings and values from its founding days throughout the years, expending all efforts to protect and preserve the cultural diversity and rights of each ethnicity, including the freedom to learn one's mother tongue as provisioned

under the Federal Constitution, as well as the prevailing principles of moderation, freedom and democracy.

As a former prime minister who led the country and achieved economic success during his tenure in the 1990s, Chong said Dr Mahathir had his fair share of contributions and failures.

"And yet, after so many years, he is still unable to break free from the extreme, racial mindset.

"At 96, one would expect Tun Mahathir to have a more seasoned outlook and come up with wiser approaches to current affairs.

"Regrettably, the nonagenarian remains unchanged in his old ways, still bitter and critical about the specifics of the ethnicity and cultures of others," he said.

Party vice-president Datuk Tan Teik Cheng also criticised Dr Mahathir's remarks, saying the Langkawi MP's narrow and racist values "have no place in Malaysia's multicultural society."

"Despite the full awareness of Malaysia's multiracial composition and having served as our nation's premier twice, Dr Mahathir

remains besotted with inciting differences in the rakyat's ethnic culture, language and lifestyle as his political capital.

"How ironic and contradictory from a disposition expected from Malaysia's most senior political figure," he said in a statement.

Tan said Dr Mahathir's remarks betray his preference that other ethnic groups must assimilate.

"Undermining national unity and instigating racial sentiments by stirring one against another, in this aspect, taking the examples of eating with hands versus eating with chopsticks is un-Malaysian and unhealthy," he said.

Whether the Malaysian Chinese eat with their hands, chopsticks, or forks and spoons or knives, Tan said our identity as Malaysians along with our citizenship cannot be changed or denied.



Multiculturalism is the country's prized asset

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