

Dr M says Umno must befriend Perkasa to regain Malay votes
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said Umno cannot afford to make enemies with Malay rights groups such as Perkasa if it is to regain the crucial Malay vote in a general election expected soon.

The former prime minister said in an interview published by Utusan Malaysia today that the Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) had suffered landmark losses in Election 2008 because “Malays did not support BN.”

“If only Chinese support, it will not be enough. In many areas where Chinese are split, Malays will decide who wins,” Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying in the newspaper’s Sunday edition, Minggu Malaysia.

The former Umno president, who is still highly influential in Umno, said many Malay non-governmental organisations wanted to support the party but were forced to take up issues that were not championed by the senior partner in the ruling coalition.

“Umno cannot afford to view Perkasa as the enemy. We cannot afford to have many enemies at this point,” Dr Mahathir, who is also Perkasa’s patron, said.

He also said Umno had a problem attracting Malays as high-calibre members of the community “are not accepted in Umno, so they join PAS.”

Umno goes into what is likely to be its last general assembly before a general election expected early next year.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is said to need a marked improvement from the last polls to retain his position and only a return of BN’s customary two-thirds majority of Parliament can guarantee he remains in office.

BN ceded 82 federal seats and five state governments to the opposition in the landmark March 2008 election.

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