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Muhd Zahid must apologise to Shahidan and family, say leaders

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KANGAR, Fri. - A remark by Parti Keadilan Nasional Youth vice-chief Muhd Zahid Md Arip on the tragic death of Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim's son has angered Barisan Nasional leaders, prompting not only them, but a DAP leader to ask for an apology.

Muhd Zahid, however, is standing by his statement, saying as a Muslim, he believes that any tragedy that befalls anyone should be considered as a lesson from God.

He said there was no reason for him to apologise to anyone.

In Kuala Lumpur, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also BN chairman, led the chorus of criticism, saying that picking on the tragedy was 'very crude'.

"There are many others whose children have died. Don't tell me these people are cruel and that's why their children died.

"I want to ask whether any Keadilan member has faced such personal tragedy. So, if a family member dies, is it because of the parents' cruelty?"

Dr Mahathir said personal tragedies should not be played up in the election campaign.

On Wednesday night, Muhd Zahid, in his speech before the announcement of Keadilan candidate Khoo Wang Chong by party president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, offered his condolences to Shahidan over his son's death and added the Menteri Besar should take the tragedy as a reminder.

In Penang, DAP national deputy chairman Karpal Singh advised Muhd Zahid to retract his adverse comment.

He said to interpret the death of the child as a signal from God to the Menteri Besar only reflected political immaturity on the part of Muhd Zahid.

Karpal said Muhd Zahid had made adverse comments about the tragedy and should immediately apologise to Shahidan and his family.

"The grief of the Menteri Besar and his family should be shared by everyone.

"It is certainly wrong for anyone to adversely comment on the tragedy," Karpal said in a statement.

Other BN leaders said Muhd Zahid's statement was in poor taste and the unethical campaigning showed that the Opposition had run out of issues for the Indera Kayangan State by-election.

BN Wanita chairman Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, expressing disgust, said it was unforgiveable for anyone to turn the tragedy into a campaign issue.

"It's in bad taste ... only people without conscience would turn such a tragedy into political capital," she said when asked to comment about it.

Rafidah said Muhd Zahid should apologise to Shahidan and his family over the remark.

In Kuala Lumpur, Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Opposition would risk losing support from the voters if they insisted on capitalising on Shahidan's tragedy.

Najib said he believed the Opposition's strategy to use the death of Shahidan's son to woo supporters would backfire.

"This only goes to show they are out of issues," he said.

"We have been monitoring the situation and there are no national issues for them to harp on... That is why I'm not surprised they have resorted to using personal issues," Najib said.

Another Umno vice-president, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, said the Opposition was desperate and `hitting below the belt'. "They are trying to smear and tarnish Shahidan's image with the hope the voters will vote for their candidate."  
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