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Johari aware of the heavy responsibility

Elizabeth John

ALOR STAR, Fri. - Datuk Johari Baharum is aware of the high standards expected of him as the Barisan Nasional candidate for the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency.

He knows he has to maintain them. After all, his predecessor was Malaysia's Prime Minister of 22 years, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"It will not be easy," he admitted.

Johari, who is the first political secretary to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said he feels the pressure of having to maintain the 10,138 vote majority secured in 1999.

While the constituency is considered the safest and a BN stronghold, Johari, 49, does not want to leave anything to chance. Not only that, he hopes to obtain a bigger majority.

He will face retired Universiti Utara Malaysia lecturer Dr Abd Isa Ismail.

If he has learnt anything from serving two Prime Ministers, it is how to deal with difficult people and difficult situations, Johari said.

"Yes, there are hardcore Pas supporters and BN's majority was considerably reduced in 1999 but issues that caused problems then are no longer present."

Johari, who hails from Kampung Paya Nong Mi in Changloon, 45 minutes from the Malaysia-Thailand border, has witnessed Kubang Pasu transformed from a sleepy backwater into a fast developing district boasting a university and an industrial zone.

He said: "A representative must be willing to serve at all times and not just at election time."

Asked if his position in Abdullah's office would cause voters to view him as just another VIP looking for a step up the political ladder, he said:

"I rose from the ranks, I have climbed trees to string up BN banners and driven lorries to deliver posters, I have sat cross-legged on the floor to share meals with people here.

"I had to work my way up and it has taken me a long time ... 24 years to rise from member to division deputy chief.

"I am not like others who secure top positions soon after joining the division," said the father of four, who worked his way up from a school teacher to a degree holder and is now studying for an MBA.

Johari says he may never match his predecessor, but will try to be the wakil rakyat people expect - one who is always available.