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'Dr M should rethink statement'

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PORT DICKSON: Kubang Pasu Umno division chief Datuk Seri Mohd Johari Baharum said he regrets former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement calling for Barisan Nasional candidates to be defeated in the by-elections in Sungai Besar, Selangor, and Kuala Kangsar, Perak.

He said the issue between Dr Mahathir and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was a personal one and it was unfair to involve BN, reported Bernama.

"He (Dr Mahathir) might have been influenced by certain parties that are not satisfied with the (Umno) president," he said after attending a passing-out parade for newly recruited army personnel here yesterday.

Johari, who is also deputy defence minister and Dr Mahathir's former political secretary, urged the former prime minister to rethink his statement.

"He must remember that when he was prime minister and faced all kinds of issues, we defended him and never stabbed him in the back."

He said he hoped Dr Mahathir would no longer issue statements that could jeopardise unity among the people.

In **George Town**, Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Seri Tajuddin Abdul Rahman said BN was optimistic about retaining the Kuala Kangsar seat with a bigger majority.

He said the coalition was unperturbed by Dr Mahathir's decision to campaign against it.

Likening Dr Mahathir to an empty barrel, Tajuddin said there was nothing that the former prime minister could raise when campaigning for the opposition.

"What are the issues he wants to raise? You tell me. Nothing."

"He has been bringing up the same old issues that we have explained and clarified repeatedly."

"I am sorry. We respect him, but not politically. Now that he is joining the other side, he is our opponent," he said here yesterday.

Tajuddin said he did not believe that the Mahathir-Kit Siang declaration had garnered 1.2 million signatures as claimed.

"It doesn't mean anything to us. What is 1.2 million? In the 14th General Election, we will fight it out to determine the outcome."

The Save Malaysia group claimed that 1.271 million signatures had been collected.

However, a former Election Commission volunteer has since claimed that he had sold confidential voters' details to various parties, including a person said to be linked to the Mahathir-Kit Siang declaration camp. Police are investigating the matter.