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# 'Johor won't secede from federation'

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**UNITY:** A strong Johor means a stronger Malaysia, says MB

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**A**RISE in "Johor nationalism" does not mean that Johor will secede from the federation of Malaysia.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, responding to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's views on the "Bangsa Johor" concept, said the concept had existed since the 1920s.

The concept, he said, was part of the state's identity and fabric that has maintained unity among the races.

"I refer to Tun Dr Mahathir's statement on the rise of Johor nationalism and the concept of Bangsa Johor.

"I have a different stand and firmly oppose the statement. My stand is in line with the view of the sultan of Johor about this matter. A rise in Johor nationalism, in any way, is not meant to lead to Johor separating from the federation of Malaysia.

"Johor is a state that is part of the federation of Malaysia and will continue to uphold its strong ties with the Federal Government," Khaled said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir had said, in a dialogue on Wednesday, that the idea of Bangsa Johor raised by Tunku Mahkota Johor Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, could lead to a breakup of the federation, and lead to residents of a state feeling superior to other states.

Sultan of Johor Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar yesterday lambasted Dr Mahathir over the latter's crit-

icism of the Bangsa Johor concept.

In its report yesterday, *The Star* quoted Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar as saying that Dr Mahathir's claim that the concept could disunite the people reflected the former prime minister's "complete ignorance" of Johor's history.

Khaled, meanwhile, said the late Sultan Sir Ibrahim Sultan Abu Bakar had introduced the phrase "Bangsa Johor" in 1920 before Merdeka, and it had ensured that unity and the spirit of *muhibbah* prevailed among the races.

"A united Bangsa Johor, who are developed and live in harmony, will not only make Johor and its people better, but will also make Malaysia and its people better.

"It will strengthen Malaysia as a federation. States that are strong with united communities will form a strong federation," said Khaled.

He said the concept was an integral part of the lives of Johoreans and that it had existed before the country achieved independence.

"Bangsa Johor is a political identity, which advocates unity and the spirit of *muhibbah*. It has set a precedent for unity across races, religions and creeds under the state's identity, which is based on harmony, understanding and tolerance," he said.

"Accept the rise of Johor nationalism and Bangsa Johor as part of Malaysia's diversity.

"Malaysia has many stories and this diversity makes Malaysia strong and special," he said.

Khaled urged Dr Mahathir to avoid talking about the concept of Bangsa Johor as it was something the former prime minister could not understand.

"There is no need for him to speak or comment on a matter that is beyond his expertise. It is something he cannot appreciate or embrace.

"I urge all quarters to emulate Johor and its nationalism. It should become a moral compass for us to appreciate our differences," he said.