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PARDON FOR ANWAR

'DON'T TAKE DR M SERIOUSLY'

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Ex-PM merely providing a diplomatic answer, says Irmohizam

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TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad's apparent willingness to support efforts to seek a royal pardon for former nemesis Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim should not be taken seriously, said Umno leaders and political pundits yesterday.

Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Seri Irmohizam Ibrahim said Dr Mahathir was giving false hope to the opposition, and that the former prime minister was merely providing a diplomatic answer to a question posed at a public forum.

"Dr Mahathir wants to gain popularity and support among Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), Pakatan Harapan and the people. His response is a political statement meant to 'sweeten' the ties between Pakatan and

PPBM," Irmohizam told the *New Sunday Times* yesterday.

He said the people must not take Dr Mahathir's statement seriously, as it may not be for the betterment of the country.

"Dr Mahathir has made yet another U-turn. In 1998, he sacked Anwar (from the deputy prime minister's post) and put him in jail.

"Dr Mahathir's support for a royal pardon to release Anwar, who was found guilty (of sodomy), is disrespectful towards the judiciary."

At the HardTalk programme organised by Persatuan Masyarakat Penyayang Selangor on Friday night, Dr Mahathir, the PPBM chairman, was asked if he would support efforts to seek a royal pardon for Anwar.

To this, he said: "If the people want Anwar, who am I to stop them."

Dr Mahathir, who was then prime minister, had in 1998 sacked Anwar over the latter's alleged involvement in corruption and sodomy.

Anwar served a six-year jail term after being convicted.

Anwar, who is serving a five-year jail sentence for a second sodomy charge, had emphasised the importance of him and Dr Mahathir working together to defeat Barisan Nasional.

During the two-hour forum, Dr Mahathir was also asked if he would lead the campaign for a royal pardon.

In response, he said: "This matter needs to be done by the prime minister. I am not the prime minister."

Selangor Umno deputy liaison committee chairman Datuk Mat Nadzari

Ahmad Dahlan, meanwhile, said Dr Mahathir's statement did not come as a surprise.

"It has been Dr Mahathir's political belief from long ago that there are no permanent enemies in politics. He will continue to make U-turns to achieve his aims. It is crucial that we are careful with this person.

"That is why the opposition is in chaos... because of a person like that," he said yesterday.

Political analyst Dr Muhammad Fuad Othman described Dr Mahathir's statement as a U-turn to

galvanise the opposition parties and their supporters.

Muhammad, a senior lecturer from Universiti Utara Malaysia, said Dr Mahathir was attempting to unite the opposition front and win the Malay electorates' support.

"He is doing this because he needs Anwar, who is seen as an icon who can pull the opposition together.

"Whether it is to fulfil the people's wish or for political expediency, that remains to be seen," he told the NST yesterday.

Muhammad said although both Dr Mahathir and Anwar seemed to be on good terms, the past animosity between them remained fresh in the people's minds.

Muhammad said Dr Mahathir had nothing to lose following his exit from Umno.

PPBM had recently signed an electoral pact with PKR, DAP and Parti Amanah Negara to ensure straight fights against Barisan Nasional in the next polls.

"This about-turn will only confuse the people who have yet to decide who to vote for in the upcoming general election.

"They will probably only decide who to support at the eleventh hour," he said.



Datuk Seri Irmohizam Ibrahim