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Johor remains Barisan Nasional's heartland through troubled times

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IT has been almost three months since Malaysians went to the polls to elect a new Government for the next five years.

Once again, the Barisan Nasional gained a fifth unprecedented victory, renewing a five-year mandate to steer Malaysia into the new millennium.

As a 26-year-old working Malaysian who is just beginning to settle in and experience life in the real world, I am thankful that the BN is once again at the helm of the Government. By just being thankful, I know I am doing something right and thinking right.

I am thankful that my mind managed to keep a clear conscience in determining the group of people who should be given the mandate to run this country.

I am proud of my decision and I feel sorry for my ungrateful friends who not only obtained their academic scrolls at the expense of the BN Government, but had the cheek to bite the hand that fed them.

Enough said about that. What I really want to share is an element which you can no longer get in Kuala Lumpur or other parts of the country which was once considered BN's stronghold. You see, my wife hails from Johor Baru and each time I go back to her hometown to visit my mother-in-law, it is like inhaling a breath of fresh air.

When my car crosses the Malacca-Johor border along the North-South Expressway, I know I am in the heart of the BN and pride of the ruling coalition, especially where Umno is concerned. The feeling gets stronger as I enter Johor Baru and the sight makes my heart soar with pride and respect.

This is a place where most cars proudly display stickers of Umno and the BN, an indication that the Johor people do not want the Opposition to even dream of capturing the State. And they have proven it.

Johor was one of the two States that delivered a 100 per cent victory for the BN in terms of State and parliamentary seats, alongside Negri Sembilan. The bottom line is, the Opposition should probably just leave Johor alone.

Having been born and bred in Kuala Lumpur, I salute the Johor people. They are a grateful lot. Since I live in Hulu Kelang, Selangor, I now have to bear the thought of being represented by someone from the Opposition. Hulu Kelang has become a stronghold of Parti Keadilan Nasional, a party which I feel was founded by a bunch of frustrated people and so-called supporters of the former Deputy Prime Minister.

I could only shake my head in disbelief on the night of the election results when his former private secretary was announced as the new Hulu Kelang State Assemblyman.

I just could not understand what the residents of Ulu Kelang see in him or Keadilan.

To me, Keadilan is a parti tepi jalan or stray party which has no clear objectives, lacks vision and was formed, based on hatred and vengeance.

Back to the subject of Johor, I had the opportunity to talk to people residing in my mother-in-law's neighbourhood. I wanted to find out how they felt about BN, particularly Umno.

I did not have to wait long for the answers. They all said they loved Umno and wanted BN to remain the State Government for as long as they lived. And I am not just talking about the elderly ones, but also the teenagers and those in the mid-20s and 30s.

If I were to conduct this interview in Kuala Lumpur, particularly in Hulu Kelang, the response would have been sickening. Only now do I realise why Johor people are so proud of their State.

I once loathed Johor people because I felt that they liked to brag and exaggerate about their home State. Well, they have every right to be proud.

They are a big part of the reason why the BN is still in power today. And I am not saying this because my wife comes from Johor. I am saying this because in the midst of a crisis where a large number of Malays are confused and even moving to Pas or Keadilan, you can still count on the Johor Malays to deliver the crucial votes needed by the BN to remain in power.

If we recap the victory speech by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Press conference on the night of the election results, he was asked by a foreign journalist about Kelantan and Terengganu, considered the Malay heartland but now lost to Pas. The journalist even pointed out that Pas had made inroads into Kedah, the Prime Minister's home State, and also considered a Malay heartland.

Dr Mahathir's response was simple and touching.

"Well, if you talk about the Malay heartland, we still have Johor," he said, followed by a thunderous applause from those present at the Putra World Trade Centre in the wee hours of that morning.

"We still have Johor." The meaning is deep and it symbolises the hopes and dreams of Umno and the BN in general. A lot of work has to be done within these five years before the next general election. Umno and BN must renew the trust of the Malays and Malaysians which has been marred for the last 1 1/2 years, no thanks to someone who is now the country's top inmate in Sungai Buloh.

But for now, I know I will always have a place to go where I don't have to wince at the sight of a Pas or Keadilan flag. There are practically no Pas or Keadilan flags in Johor.

The next time I am in Johor, I know I am in the real Malay heartland - the BN's heartland.