

## **Gen Hashim identifies Shahrir's Achilles' Heel**

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**By Terence Netto**

JOHOR Gen (Ret) Md Hashim Hussein, PKR parliamentary candidate for Johor Bahru, said he has detected the Achilles' Heel of his opponent, the redoubtable Shahrir Samad of Umno, but the former army chief is, of course, not going to let others in on the discovery.

"We are advised by Sun Tzu to know the adversary, his strengths and weaknesses," said the general who loves to spout military philosophy and is apt to extract nuggets of campaign wisdom from his experience heading a Malaysian peacekeeping contingent in Bosnia in 1992.

"I think I have detected his weakness - of course, I'm not going to say what it is," said Hashim (in red scarf), who has styled himself 'jeneral rakyat' (people's general).

Starting out as the underdog in the battle to defeat one of the more durable parliamentarians in Malaysian politics, Hashim, a newcomer to politics, sensed he had the edge on his opponent when during an exchange of pleasantries at the nominations centre in Larkin, Johor Bahru, last Saturday, he said he remembered his fellow Malay College alumnus.

A gallant rendition of the gentleman's code in the circumstances would have required that Shahrir, 64, younger to Hashim's 66 years, affect to know the general in their days at the Malay College Kuala Kangsar even if he actually didn't.

In the event, Shahrir (left) said he could not recall the general such that observers of the exchange were apt to also note as pre-indicative Shahrir's earlier aloofness - he sat alone and unspeaking - in the prelude to submission of nomination forms.

When a few days later, Shahrir, who is not known to bring his wife to anything other than social occasions, had her in tow while plugging for votes in Chinese-dominant wards of Johor Bahru - Shahrir's wife is Chinese - the indications in favour of his opponent's prospects arrived at a critical mass.

Formidable contender

It isn't hard to infer that Shahrir, compiler of daunting majorities over his

opponents - 46,000-plus votes in the 2004 election and 25,000-plus in 2008 one - is up against it in GE13.

Retaining Johor Bahru for Umno is not going to be the saunter it used to be over the last three decades for one of Umno's more winning parliamentary candidates.

This is because PKR has a formidable contender for the seat in Hashim who is apt to invoke the paradigm of a military campaign in his plans, his experience in Bosnia during the wars of the former Yugoslavia being the touchstone.

His aides find his mastery of facts and attention to the minutiae of campaign detail challenging, if sometimes exhausting.

"Success in this campaign is not going to come as a breakthrough," opined Hashim.

"In this campaign, success is a hundred things done a little better, failure a hundred things done a little worse," said Hashim, while speaking at the PKR divisional headquarters in Bandar Baru UDA in Johor Bahru, against a backdrop of walls spread with maps detailing areas that marked 'white', 'black' and 'grey,' denoting localities reckoned to be for, against and leaning respectively towards the challenger.

"He has a good instinct for where effort would be wasted and where it would be worthwhile," said Mohd Salleh Ahmad, the PKR candidate for the state ward of Tanjong Puteri which falls under the Johor Bahru parliamentary seat.

"It's quite an experience working under and with him. We can see how useful his military experience has been and we are challenged to learn fast from it," said Salleh.

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