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Johoreans will continue to vote for progress

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TRACK RECORD: They would not want to disrupt the development enjoyed by voting in the opposition

I MADE the impromptu decision to go home last week. I couldn't possibly refuse the SMS invitation from Pulai Umno chief Datuk Nurjazlan Mohamed for the "Bicara Perdana bersama Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad" at the Projek Perumahan Rakyat Kempas Permai.

You see, the only thing that still denotes me as a Johorean, besides my birth certificate which indicated the address of the house at Jalan Ayer Molek where I was born and the '01' in the MyKad which represented the state, is my voter status.

To this day, I am still registered as a voter in Johor. The electoral list listed my locality as 161/47/03/010 — Jalan Lurah 6, polling district 161/47/03 — Lembah Kempas), state assembly (161/47 — Kempas) and parliamentary (161 — Pulai).

Furthermore, it could possibly be the only rally I will be attending as I may be on duty throughout the campaigning period.

Some 10,000 to 15,000 people turned up at the event. In fact, I saw some familiar faces there that night; Johor-born friends from Kuala Lumpur who had also made their way down for Dr Mahathir.

"He has long retired but he can still draw the crowd," I overheard someone commenting that night. The crowd surged to the front of the stage when Dr Mahathir arrived

with his entourage which included his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. They wanted to catch a glimpse of the couple.

An Umno member, whose division is in Kuala Lumpur, told me how it was back then for Dr Mahathir when he came to Johor. "After he retired and during the last administration, no one wanted to be seen with him (Dr Mahathir) or at his (Dr Mahathir's) events here (in Johor). Now, things have changed."

Indeed, it has. That night, we also saw some Johor politicians at the event.

Some said Dr Mahathir's strong aura drew the crowd to the event, but I asked myself what made the former statesman decide to come to Pulai?

Nurjazlan had in his speech said that the last time Dr Mahathir visited Pulai was when the late Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat was the Member of Parliament for the constituency some 20-odd years ago.

For years, the opposition had tried and failed to win seats in Johor. The state has always been noted as a BN fortress although that was breached in the 2004 election, which saw the Senggarang seat as Pas'.

The fact remained, however, that the seat was won uncontested as the BN candidate's nomination was rejected by the returning officer on a technicality.



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad speaking at a rally in Kempas Permai, Johor on April 1. Pic by Mohamad Shahril Badri Saali

In 2008, the Opposition won one parliamentary and five state seats.

Johor has one of the highest numbers of registered voters in the country at 1.5 million. Of the total, there are some 300,000 new voters compared with the 2008 election, of which 18,000 are in Pulai.

I don't know who the new voters will choose this election — they may be registered to vote in Pulai but they are not Johoreans; living in Johor and working across the Causeway — but Johoreans will vote in the government that can assure continued development.

Take Kempas for example. What the Malays called "tempat jin bertandang" (backwaters) before (the jungle of Kempas was where people took refuge during the Japanese Occupation) is now a thriving commercial and residential area.

Rapid development set in when the main Kempas road was made part of the North-South Expressway and served as the link road into the city and also Pasir Gudang.

The city's amenities can be found in our backyard, making it a

hangout for local and expatriate Johoreans. The country's first Starbucks Coffee Drive Thru is in Kempas; at Setia Tropika, to be exact. Fast food joints such as Pizza Hut and KFC are operating 24 hours daily alongside mamak restaurants.

Government agencies such as the Immigration Department and the National Registration Department are in Kempas. Some multinational corporations have made Kempas their centre of operation. There is not only a Health Ministry nursing college there, but also a private specialist medical centre.

These developments that we are enjoying in Kempas and elsewhere in the state speak highly for the past and current state administrations.

Personally, I don't think having high profile campaigners in the state after nomination day when campaigning starts will make a whole lot of difference to the way we vote.

I doubt if we want to disrupt the development that we are enjoying now by voting in the opposition.

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