

**In Johor, Chinese set to snub BN in polls**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**January 11 , 2012**  
**By Shannon Teoh**

JOHOR BARU, Jan 11 — Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman has been pounding the pavement since late October, spending at least four days a week on the ground ahead of the general election as Barisan Nasional (BN) faces the prospect of losing more Chinese votes.

Tellingly, he kicked off with Gelang Patah, Tebrau, Kulai, Pulai and Muar (twice) — all constituencies that have at least a 40 per cent Chinese electorate. The fear is they are beginning to think like their northern counterparts who threw out BN from Penang and Perak in Election 2008.

Apart from meeting voters and supporters, he spends hours each day being briefed by the BN machinery on voter sentiment, detailing levels of support in each suburb and, in some cases, each street.

“He’s been on the ground in all these seats the opposition thinks it can win,” a top official in Ghani’s administration told The Malaysian Insider.

According to reformist think-tank Zentrum Future Studies, Abdul Ghani has good reason to be worried.

The wave of anger that swept through the rest of the Malaysian peninsula in Election 2008 missed the Umno birthplace and bastion where Pakatan Rakyat (PR) won just one federal and six state seats out of 26 and 56 on offer respectively.

But Professor Abu Hassan Hasbullah, who runs the Universiti Malaya-based centre, told The Malaysian Insider that its end-of-year surveys have seen Johor Chinese catch up with and possibly overtake their northern kin in terms of backing PR.

Opposition leaders in the state estimate that they won 55 per cent of Chinese votes in the last election but Abu Hassan said support from the community has surged to close to 90 per cent.

“We are seeing what can be called a silent Tionghua revolution,” he told The Malaysian Insider, adding that Chinese approval of PR in Johor rose to 68 per cent after the last election and climbed further to 79 per cent in 2010.

According to Abu Hassan, Malay support for the opposition has not shifted from Election 2008 and remains between 25 and 30 per cent, therefore putting 15 federal and 30 state seats within reach of PR.

PKR held its national congress in Johor at the end of November, claiming it was ready to take over the state.

Analysts say that such a swing in the BN stronghold would practically mean enough gains

nationwide for PR to add the 30 federal seats it needs to seize Putrajaya as well.

But the pact's members have warned against trumpeting its chances in Johor as it would result in attacks from Umno of being a "Chinese government."

"It's clear that if we win it will mostly be from Chinese support. After the accusations in Penang and Perak, it is easy for Umno to attack us by asking who will be MB," said PAS's Sungai Abong assemblyman Dr Sheikh Ibrahim Salleh.

DAP state chief Dr Boo Cheng Hau also agreed with the PAS state committee member that it was more important to concentrate on making gains.

"We must try not to fall into that trap, and dodge the question of MB-ship and forming the state government. Our strategy is not to alarm voters but to tell voters we need to deny BN two-thirds.

"Then, if we form [the] government, we will ensure a Malay MB and citizens will have to accept the election result," the Skudai assemblyman said, adding that PR is on track to add seven MPs from the state.

PKR has refused to answer the question regarding its MB candidate but a local division chief told The Malaysian Insider "we have no one since Abdul Razak Ahmad," referring to the late state chief.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Pontian-born PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayub may be forced to relinquish his Kubang Kerian federal seat and return to Johor.

Sembrong, a federal seat with about 40 per cent Chinese voters near Kluang, has been touted as a potential landing point for Salahuddin.

Rumours have circulated that incumbent Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein may move to Kota Tinggi, a safer seat that will likely be vacated by Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar, who was dropped from the Cabinet by Datuk Seri Najib Razak when he took power in 2009.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/in-johor-chinese-set-to-snob-bn-in-polls/>