

Salahuddin says will contest in Johor
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 31 — PAS vice president Salahuddin Ayub has confirmed he will return to Johor, beefing up Johor Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) plans to take over the state in the next general elections.

The Kubang Kerian MP said this at a dinner with the press last night in Skudai, Johor but declined to say whether he would be menteri besar if the opposition coalition took over the state in upcoming polls.

"The matter of who is to be menteri besar must be decided by the PR leadership and the matter has not been raised at all till now," he said.

The Malaysian Insider reported on February 6 Johor PR leaders have held "serious discussions" with Salahuddin Ayub for the PAS vice-president to stand in his home state to address the lack of a strong Malay leader as a possible menteri besar candidate.

The opposition in Johor expects to make huge gains in the next general election on the back of increased Chinese support but the lack of a viable potential MB has already resulted in attacks from Umno that a PR administration would be a "Chinese government."

The Malaysian Insider understands that the Pontian-born Salahuddin (picture) has held several closed-door meetings with top Johor PR leaders.

The former PAS Youth chief also said yesterday "Pulai, Tanjung Piai or even Batu Pahat seems to be attractive seats to contest," adding that the move has been endorsed by Johor and Kelantan PAS as well the party's central leadership.

But a source told The Malaysian Insider last month "the seats for him to contest have already been identified. He may contest in both federal and state seats but our priority is for him to stand as an assemblyman."

It is understood that Sembrong, a federal seat near Kluang with about 40 per cent Chinese voters, has also 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 the prime minister took power in 2009.

Johor DAP chief Dr Boo Cheng Hau also told The Malaysian Insider last November he invited Salahuddin to return to the state.

"I have invited Salahuddin to contest here because we need a national-level leader here," the Skudai assemblyman said.

Salahuddin has been MP for Kubang Kerian in Kelantan for two terms and PAS conventionally allows leaders from other states to contest in its northern stronghold for two elections.

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

But Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman has been pounding the pavement since late October especially in constituencies with at least 40 per cent Chinese voters in anticipation of a swing towards PR.

"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.

Opposition leaders in the state estimate that they won 55 per cent of Chinese votes in the last election but a study by reformist think-tank Zentrum Future Studies 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, saying 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.

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 their chances in Johor as it would result in attacks from Umno of being a "Chinese government".

PKR deputy president and election director Azmin Ali also told The Malaysian Insider recently that the party has "accepted the plan for Salahuddin to contest in Johor."

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