

PPBM: BN 'safe deposit' seats in Felda areas now history

Free Malaysia Today

May 18, 2017

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Opposition parties will continue to bank on the Mahathir factor to capture more votes from Felda settlers in the next general election.

PETALING JAYA: PPBM, the opposition party led by former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, believes the changing political situation in the country will help it make further inroads into electoral constituencies covering Felda schemes which are dubbed "safe deposit seats" of Barisan Nasional (BN).

"Felda's BN safe deposit seats are now history. People change as the situations change. If Felda is doing well, the settlers will continue to support BN. But it is public knowledge now what has been happening in Felda," said PPBM information chief Kamaruddin Md Nor.

"BN might have had a strong hold in Felda areas in the past, but the settlers are able to think for themselves and they are aware of everything that is going on in Felda."

Kamaruddin was referring to the financial woes and mismanagement besetting the federal land development agency, leaving many settlers with huge debts and struggling to make ends meet.

Settlers were also disappointed with the lack of returns from their investments in Felda Global Ventures Holdings, a subsidiary of Felda, listed in 2012 amid much hype of being the largest crude palm oil producer in the world.

The listing raised billions of ringgit and the settlers received a windfall of RM15,000 per family, but the company's share price sank later from nearly RM5 apiece to below RM2.

The Auditor-General's Report also raised concerns over the alleged improper spending of funds amounting to RM200 million.

"Though the Felda chairman (Shahrir Abdul Samad) admits that various things were done without following protocol in the agency, it will take time to win back the confidence of Felda settlers again," said Kamaruddin.

He said opposition parties, which had been conducting their own programmes in areas fringing the Felda schemes, had received positive feedback from the settlers.

“The programmes had to be conducted outside the schemes because no approval was given by the Felda management but we still received positive turnouts when the settlers went out of the schemes to join our programmes,” Kamaruddin said.

He also refuted claims that Mahathir’s influence among Felda settlers was on the wane.

In fact, Kamaruddin said, opposition parties were banking on the PPBM chairman’s influence in the 14th general election to attract votes from among the settlers.

There are about 60 parliamentary seats covering Felda schemes, out of which 54 were won by BN in the last general election.

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Source: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/05/18/ppbm-bn-safe-deposit-seats-in-felda-areas-now-history/>