

GE14: Will Pagoh voters continue to stand by Muhyiddin?

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PETALING JAYA: There is continued speculation that PPBM president Muhyiddin Yassin will move to the nearby Muar parliamentary seat and not contest in Pagoh in the next general election.

Those talking about such a move say Muar would be safer for him as it has more urban Malay and Chinese constituents compared with his current constituency.

Word has it that if he goes to Muar, he will have to face Umno's Razali Ibrahim, who is working hard to defend the seat. But it is not clear yet who will take him on if he stays in Pagoh.

Two names are being mentioned as possible Barisan Nasional candidates for the Pagoh parliamentary seat: Pagoh Umno chief Ismail Mohamed, the first-term Bu-kit Serampang assemblyman and state exco member in charge of agriculture and agro-based industries, and Pagoh Umno Wanita chief Senator Noriah Maha.

Muhyiddin himself, however, is not saying whether he'll stay or move, although his answers to questions at a recent interview indicate he is likely to defend his seat.

But things will be different this time, as he will be contesting as an opposition candidate.

"I do have interest in contesting in Pagoh, but I also need to be sure that the people of Pagoh are still interested to vote for me. I must be sure they are not tired of me," he told FMT.

"What I gather from the ground so far is that people will vote for me because I am a familiar face among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. They believe that I will still be able to help make changes even though I am no longer in the government," he said.

Muhyiddin, who retained the Pagoh seat in the 2013 general election with a 12,842 majority after securing 26,274 votes to beat Mohd Rozali Jamil of PAS, said voters in Pagoh understood why he left Umno.

“They know I left because I want to fight for the people’s rights, to tell the truth. They have shown respect for the stand I’ve taken.”

He said his constituents knew he needed a vehicle through which to continue serving them and to fight for the people, and that is why PPBM was formed.

Muhyiddin was sacked from the cabinet in 2015 after he questioned the lack of action following allegations of financial irregularities at 1Malaysia Development Bhd and openly criticised the leadership of Umno president Najib Razak.

Together with former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Muhyiddin and several others formed PPBM.

The Pagoh MP, who held the constituency from 1978 to 1986 and from 1995 till now, said he was told that his name had become synonymous with Pagoh.

“Pagoh has been with me for a long time, and I have been with Pagoh for a long time too. People cannot deny the fact that in the last 40 years, I have been involved in the development of Pagoh.

“Some say that my name has become synonymous with Pagoh; I do hope that is the case. Back then there was no water supply and people would put out empty tins to collect water. When I used to be an MP with the ruling party, there were certain areas where there was no electricity supply too.

“People used to request for phone booths, but now everyone uses mobile phones” he said, recalling that he had also helped establish schools, universities and mostly significantly the Pagoh Education Hub.

In 1986, he contested and won the Bukit Serampang state seat, under the Pagoh constituency, and became Johor menteri besar. His tenure as menteri besar lasted until May 6, 1995.

Muhyiddin returned to contest the Pagoh parliamentary seat in the 1995 general election and served several different federal government cabinet posts including as youth and sports minister (1995 to 1999), domestic trade and consumer affairs minister (2004 to 2008) and international trade and industry minister (2008 to 2009).

He was appointed deputy prime minister and education minister by Prime Minister Najib Razak in 2009.

“The Pagoh you see today has gone through many physical changes and the people also know me for these changes. And I say this not because I am praising myself, but it is evident based on what I hear from the ground, because the people remember what I have done for them,” he said.

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