

## **'Fear preventing Johor Umno members from openly backing PH'**

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PETALING JAYA: PPBM president Muhyiddin Yassin has claimed that many Umno members in Johor want to exit the party, but are afraid to do so until the time is safe and right for them.

The former deputy prime minister said PPBM and other components in Pakatan Harapan (PH) still had much work to do to see tangible support in the lead-up to the 14th general election (GE14) as Johor was a traditional Umno stronghold.

“There are still issues of fear that we need to deal with because Johor is a BN (Barisan Nasional) state.

“Its people, who have supported Umno for so many years, are scared and don't want to be recognised openly for their support for PH,” he told FMT.

“Based on our studies done on the ground, even those who are still in Umno are on the point of moving out when the right time comes,” he said.

The seven-term MP for Pagoh in Johor was commenting on a survey by Johor PPBM which found that support for the opposition in Felda settlements had changed in PH's favour.

He said examples of farmers' grievances against the BN government involved lack of subsidies for fertilisers, positions in village committees, and relevant aid and allowances.

He said these sentiments were also attested to by think-tanks like the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore (ISEAS), Institute of Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) and Merdeka Center.

He said the studies found backing for PH had improved compared with when the coalition was formed in September 2015.

"When we visited Felda settlers, we (PH) were shocked that they actually welcomed us," said Muhyiddin, who was Johor menteri besar from 1986 to 1995.

"The opposition was never welcomed in Felda settlements. You could never eat or pray in these areas before.

"This is not the case any more today. We can even eat at the same table with the imam," he said, describing it as unusual.

"They are feeling hardship stemming from bad government policies and are feeling the heat from the rising cost of living," he added.

Muhyiddin also said no one had removed the PPBM and PH flags put up two or three days before their events in various areas.

He said although there were more Felda settlers attending the rallies, many were still afraid to be seen at such events.

“But we know for sure they will support us,” he said.

“The support for PH is better, much more than before. During these rallies, they ask many questions,” he said, adding that they provided PH with constructive feedback on voters’ sentiments.

PH eyes 13 more seats to win Johor

Muhyiddin also said PPBM had identified seats that it intended to wrest from Umno.

He said of the 56 state seats, PH parties were occupying 16.

He said the coalition needed at least 13 more seats to make up the minimum 29 to form the state government.

As for parliamentary seats in Johor, PPBM has identified six that it can confidently wrest from Umno.

“Now we already have six (parliamentary) seats under PH, and we have identified six more which we believe Umno will lose... In that sense, Johor is within reach of PH.”

He declined to reveal the six parliamentary seats that PPBM has identified.

Seats won by Umno in the last general election in May 2013 with a small majority were Muar, Pulai, Ledang, Sekijang, Pasir Gudang and Johor Baru.

Marginal seats won by other BN parties included Segamat, Labis and Tebrau.

Muhyiddin also said BN should not take Johoreans for granted as they were more well-informed today.

He said they had become more open-minded due to their close proximity to Singapore and they were able to compare the issues in the two countries.

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Sources: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/highlight/2018/03/04/fear-preventing-johor-umno-members-from-openly-backing-ph/>