

PPBM admits it'll be tough to take Maran

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PETALING JAYA: Pahang PPBM leader Wan Mohd Shahrir Abdul Jalil has acknowledged that the battle for the Maran parliament seat will be among the toughest his party will face in the coming election.

Speaking to FMT, he said PPBM would be facing the challenge of unseating a deputy minister from a constituency in which Malays make up 95% of the electorate and within which lies the Kuala Sentul state seat, which is served by a hands-on representative.

Maran town, which is about halfway between Temerloh and Kuantan, is surrounded by isolated forests and oil palm plantations mainly operated by Felda Jengka, the largest Felda settlement in the country.

Maran became a parliamentary constituency in 1974 and has been an Umno stronghold since. Ismail Mutalib, who became the human resource deputy minister after GE13, has been its MP since GE11.

Although Ismail's popularity seems to be on a slow decline, in GE13 he managed to win more than 19,000 of the votes compared to the 12,000-odd votes that went to PAS's Mujibur Rahman.

PAS has been vying for the seat since 1978, but hasn't come close to even making a dent in Umno's support in the area despite fielding big guns like deputy president Tuan Ibrahim Man and information chief Nasrudin Hassan.

Kuala Sentul is one of three state seats within Maran, the other two being Luit and Chenor.

Kuala Sentul is held by Shahaniza Samsuddin, who took over from Rosni Zahari in 2008. Shahaniza's majority increased by 1,000 votes in GE13 compared to her GE12 achievement.

The Chenor assemblyman, Mohamed Arifin Awang Ismail, also did well in GE13. He won with a 7,292 majority against PAS' Hasenan Haron, who got only 4,983 votes.

However, Luit almost fell to PAS' M Shahrul Nizam Abdul Haliff in GE13 with its current assemblyman Nurhidayah Mohamad Shahaimi winning by only 400 votes. PPBM sees a weakness there that it hopes to capitalise on.

That weakness, coupled with the inroads PPBM has claimed to have made into Felda settlements, makes Wan Shahrir believe that it is not impossible for his party to beat Umno in Maran.

He said his party would focus on winning votes not only in Luit, but also Chenor.

"BN is strong in the Felda settlements in Chenor, including Sungai Nerek, Kampung Awah and Jengka 7, but with the problems the settlers are facing, it is possible to sway their votes," he said.

"If Luit and Chenor can be taken, BN will fall in Maran."

The only time the opposition came anywhere close to beating BN in Maran was in 1999, during the Reformasi era. PAS's Tengku Puji Abdul Hamid managed to gain 44% of the votes.

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