

## **Jerantut's land spread a challenge to Pakatan**

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PETALING JAYA: Perhaps the biggest challenge to Pakatan Harapan in its bid to wrest Jerantut from Barisan Nasional is the geographical spread of the constituency.

It is a huge parliamentary constituency and the campaign will require a tremendous amount of resources.

To give an idea of the area's size, Pahang PPBM chief Wan Mohd Shahrir Abdul Jalil noted that the Tahan state constituency, one of three within the Jerantut parliamentary district, is as big as the entire state of Negeri Sembilan.

With voters spread across such a wide area, campaigning effectively would require a lot of time and physical resources, he told FMT.

"BN has the upper hand in terms of its machinery, but then I, as a Jerantut native, have some advantage because I know the place like the back of my hand," he said.

Wan Shahrir indicated that he was hoping to be chosen as his party's candidate for the seat.

Wan Shahrir hopes to be chosen as PPBM's candidate for the seat.

"My machinery may not be as large as BN's, but I have people all over the district," he said. "I also have a lot of friends and relatives who will be volunteering at the 54 polling districts."

He said Pakatan's decision to field a PPBM candidate for Jerantut was motivated by a belief that the party's chairman, former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, is hugely popular in the area.

The seat was created in time for the 1974 general election and Umno has, since then, been winning it in contests against PAS.

According to the 2010 national census, more than 80% of Jerantut folk are Malays, about 11% are Chinese and about 3% are Indians. Other races make up the remainder.

According to Wan Shahrir, most of the Malays in Jerantut are conservative, but not hardline, Muslims.

“Whether a candidate is religious is not of too much concern to them,” he said.

“What concerns the rural Malays seems to be the economy while the semi-urban Malays are more concerned with development. The semi-urban Malays also want to ensure that the economy is good enough that businesses are able to thrive and their children are able to find employment.”

As for Felda settlers, he said, many had become angry over alleged problems facing the corporation. “I expect to see a lot of protest votes from them. I don’t know how many, but I’m sure there’ll be a lot more than in GE13.”

Wan Shahrir was born in Kampug Bantal, Hulu Tembeling, on the outskirts of Jerantut. His father, the late Wan Abdul Jalil Tok Muda Wan Mustafa, was an active Umno member. One of his uncles, Tok Muda Wan Abu Bakar Wan Mohamad, was the MP for Jerantut from 1986 to 1995.

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