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Barisan record speaks for itself, but what can the Opposition offer?

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THE crux of the electoral contest between the Barisan Nasional and the Alternative Front lies in what each can offer to the people in terms of development and quality of life.

In this respect, the facts speak for themselves for the BN.

Privatisation, Malaysia Incorporated, Look East, New Economic Policy ... have all yielded results.

The recent Formula 1 race and the World Cup Golf championship which ended yesterday are more proof of the successful manner in which the BN has proved its worth.

The bottomline here is that the BN government is not short of ideas on how to improve the livelihood of the people and develop the country.

And this makes the crucial difference between the BN and the Opposition.

Given that the millennium is around the corner, this assumes even greater importance.

Such is the success of the BN formula and policies that even the Opposition has recognised them for what they are worth although it is not saying so in so many words.

One example of its respect for the BN formula is the formulation of its own Alternative Front where Pas is working with opposition parties including the DAP.

This is an admission that the BN has a workable formula to bring about peace, stability, harmony, progress and development among the various races in the country.

However one looks at it, the Opposition parties do not seem to have a long-term plan for peace and stability. Nor do they have ideas and vision on how to take the country forward.

BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that the BN Government does not make empty promises but delivers what it promises is a truism.

In addition, it designs and implements a lot more but does not even talk about them before hand.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, they say, and this is where the fruits of development are best appreciated.

Safe drinking water, electricity, paved roads, clinics, hospitals, schools, and employment opportunities are examples of this - the culmination of 42 years of service to the people. The statistics are a record for posterity.

Per capita income increased from US\$300 in 1957 to RM2,805 in 1978 to RM12,134 this year.

In terms of purchasing power parity, per capita in Malaysia has risen to US\$8,604 this year.

There is full employment in the country, despite the financial crisis, and due to the economic prosperity, more than two million foreign workers are employed.

Malaysia is also recognised as being among the most developed and progressive of Islamic countries. It is probably the only Islamic country that is close to gaining developed-nation status.

Even during the recent financial crisis, policies were designed and implemented to protect the population and to ensure that they were not adversely affected by the activities of currency speculators.

Malaysia is perhaps the only country in the world that maintained price

controls on essential commodities even during difficult times such as the crisis.

Poverty has been reduced to 6.8 per cent of the population this year against 13.5 per cent in 1996 and from a high of 49.3 per cent in 1970. What is even more remarkable is that poverty has been reduced across the board, in the urban and rural areas and among the various races.

The measure of poverty in Malaysia is not static and the poverty line has been raised from RM280 a month to about RM400 a month.

Even at this higher level, the number of those considered to be poor has been drastically reduced. Unlike many other countries, there is no absolute poverty.

In Malaysia, according to estimates by the Economic Planning Unit, the crisis had pushed about 200,000 more people below the poverty line or an increase of 0.9 percentage points of the population, the smallest increase among the crisis-hit countries.

In Malaysia, progress and development is not only visible but is also enjoyed by the people. Many appreciate the comforts and the improved quality of life brought to them by the BN government. Life expectancy has risen to 77 years and the mortality rate has declined drastically.

Education is now available to all unlike previously when only a chosen few could dream of going to college or university.

The Government has implemented unorthodox and sometimes "controversial" policies in the interest of its citizens. Many of the policies, given time, have proven to be beneficial.

The most recent were the policies designed and implemented, such as selective capital controls, in dealing with the financial crisis.

The most severe test of a government's ability is during a crisis. The BN government, according to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, had been "tested" several times since 1957.

The most severe economic test of its ability was during the recent financial crisis. And it has passed with flying colours.

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