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Democracy alive and well

THE Barisan Nasional (BN) will have to live with the setbacks of the 10th general elections: it failed to wrest Kelantan from Pas and also lost neighbouring Terengganu, while Permatang Pauh went to the Opposition, and the huge popular vote that swept the coalition to its biggest general election victory in 1995 has been reduced. But the Opposition, with its battle cry for "change", was dealt some huge blows. The DAP, once an Opposition force, has been reduced to being minnows, with both Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh losing their battles in Penang; Keadilan lost almost all its heavyweights and seems destined for extinction along with its politics of passion; and PBS lost much of its sting in Sabah. That has left Pas re-affirming itself as the major Opposition force by forming state governments in the two East Coast states, but it has failed to make similar impact elsewhere.

The people have made their choice and they have once again elected the BN to lead them for yet another five-year term, and into the new millennium. More importantly, the people have given the coalition the two-thirds majority in Parliament and this, more than anything else, is what the BN needs in order to govern as effectively as it has done for more than four decades. Accomplished in the wake of two extremely difficult years for local politics and the regional economy, the fresh two-thirds mandate from the people is a resounding tribute to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership. Against the backdrop of an unprecedented hate campaign against him since the sacking of his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, in which some foreign elements clearly had a hand, the Prime Minister and BN chairman led the BN to yet another national polls victory. The BN will form nine state governments, not counting Sabah and Sarawak which hold their state elections separately, and has at press time 147 seats in Parliament. It made a clean sweep in Johor, and in Kelantan and Terengganu retained several seats from where it has five years to mount a new challenge in the next general elections.

While it is clear that most Malaysians generally do not see the logic for change, especially when the incumbent Government has achieved so much for the nation and its people. Some voters had clearly been influenced by factors other than development, prosperity and stability. The losses in Kelantan and Terengganu certainly went against the overall voting trends. There will be time to study those polls setbacks and the factors that contributed to them, find out where they went wrong and start making the necessary corrections. If Kelantan under Pas is anything to go by, the new state government in Terengganu is not expected to be able to achieve much in terms of economic development in the next five years. If this happens, it will have a negative impact on the country's development as a whole and will slow down Malaysia's charge towards industrialisation.

It will make the task of the BN Government more complicated and in the two states quite difficult. But the coalition has a track record of performing well under pressure and can be expected to deliver its promises where the people have chosen it. The BN Government has led the country out of the mid-1980s recession to subsequently register rapid economic growth rates for a full decade and has just taken Malaysia out of the region's worst economic crisis with the 8.1 per cent growth in the third quarter and 4.1 per cent in the preceding quarter. The measures it has put in place, including the selective capital controls, have the support of the

majority of Malaysians and this should carry the nation through well into the new millennium.

The outcome of the 10th general elections shows, as all previous ones did, that democracy is alive and well in Malaysia. Some Opposition members who had cast doubt that the polls would be fair have found themselves declared winners. They should now stop their cheap rhetorics about corrupt systems and their wild accusations of injustice for the sake of discrediting the Government. If there had been any truth in their claims, they would not have won the seats they contested and the so-called establishment would not have lost two states.

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