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Issues in a general election

THE general election, at least in this country, is not a popularity contest. It is not about selecting specific candidates who encapsulate the differing perceptions of different factions of the community. It is not even about choosing men of articulation, calibre or capability to elected office. It is simply the process, as the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, never tired of repeating, to elect a Government that would ensure unity, continuity, progress and economic development.

Together these factors would contribute to the stability of the country, that meals are placed on the dinner table, that everyone, well almost everyone, has a solid roof over his head and that his children's future welfare is safeguarded. That in essence is the basic issue in any and all general elections. So it is in this 10th election.

Ideals and ideologies are fine. Expressed through the ballot box they invariably lead to fragmentary and fractious factions that do not foster smooth and continued governance. So they are best left to the Promethean world of ideals. What any country needs to progress and move on is a stable Government. That has been the heritage, so far, of the country since the first elections in pre-independence Malaya in 1955. Then the people voted for a party, or a coalition of parties who best espoused their aspirations. The elected then worked towards obtaining the desired independence. Subsequent elections returned the same Alliance to form the Government, ensuring continuity of implementing well-thought out policies and building upon past achievements.

Stability and continuity have been the overriding themes of the past nine Governments. Each time the incumbent went to the hustings it requested the voters' endorsement for continued progress. And the electorate, the majority at least, always provided the stamp of approval.

Times have changed; much development have materialised. The old nitty-gritty concerns of the communities over the lack of basic amenities and facilities have been, in the main, relegated to the footnotes of the social history books. The country is now, after 42 years of independence, in the vanguard of the most developed among developing nations. This is the fruit of continued governance of a wisely cobbled coalition of parties representing the interests of the diverse ethnic groups and cultures of the country.

The time thus is not for change to elect an untested and unwieldy alternative but rather of continuation of past policies that have begotten progress and development. And the time could not be of more import. Next year is the beginning of the new millennium. The year after would see the implementation of yet another grand master plan for taking the development of the country to new heights - the Third Outline Perspective Plan covering the years, 2001 to 2010. It would also see the launch of the Eighth Malaysia Plan. Programmes in both documents would build on the past and nudge the progress further. All told the schemes portend a better life for all, young and old.

Clearly then the choice in this general election is simple as it is clear. A coalition that has a record of performance against another that holds only the rhetoric of promise and ideals. All work hard to ensure children would have a better life. That should be the decisive factor. Ensure stability and progress for the sake of children and their children.

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