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Malaysia's big chance to send a message

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THE Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) seeks from the Malaysian people a fresh five-year mandate on Monday to take us into the new millennium and give the nation a millennial impetus to do even better than before.

We are already gaining in fact. The economy grew by 8.1 per cent in the third quarter of this year, the recession is over, the prospect of long-term growth is real and achievable.

Everyone will benefit: the farmers, the business community, institutional as well as individual investors, the Government, telecommunications, plantations, the entertainment segment, civil servants and others.

I predict, all being well, within two decades of the new century, a majority of Malaysians and given the right push and encouragement by the BN Government which we are re-electing on Monday, will be working directly or indirectly in, or for the e-commerce, manufacturing, financial services, Internet entertainment services, and in all kinds of service industries or holding knowledge-based jobs.

These sophisticated services, commerce and professions will give birth to a new Bangsa Malaysia and define a new well-balanced Malaysian culture which may spread at the speed of an electronic impulse.

In his gentle political fashion, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has been lecturing the nation especially the young people the history of how we have attained our present position which must be defended and enhanced.

He wants us to continue living in peace, prosperity and in an independent sovereign nation free of fear and want.

I have no doubt the new BN Government under the IT-savvy Dr Mahathir will push innovation and creativity more aggressively in Malaysian schools and universities for this is the only way for Malaysia to be abreast with the emerging and changing economic and political environment.

Malaysian corporations and institutions of higher learning must become adept at translating ideas into innovative products and services for the customers.

The new BN Government will, I believe, vigorously continue, unlike the PAS Government in Kelantan, to invest in women who form about 60 per cent of Monday's voters and in the nation's workforce.

The youth should and must become computer literate and Information Age savvy, bilingual even trilingual. Needless to say, English is a must.

Our lives will be affected by various developments in the new century even in its first decade. But as long as the Malaysian economy performs well, and appears to be doing alright for most of us, the national cohesion will remain intact.

As long as the BN rules, the prospects remain bright and Malaysians are generally very perceptive - always knowing what is good for them. They will not allow all manner of bad things to happen nor experiment with untried hands.

They know where power lies; they will hand it over yet again to the well-trying and experienced Dr Mahathir, who together with Tun Daim Zainuddin, have brought us once again out of recession.

The economic crisis proved to be a good lesson in politics for Dr Mahathir, Tun Daim and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, more so for Dr Mahathir, who has set out to lead us for many more years to come despite

endless concerted efforts by the Opposition and their "official mouthpiece - the international media" which one of them says that "One day soon, Malaysia may be theirs".

Despite the prediction by the international media that this is Dr Mahathir's last hurrah I expect him to be on the Malaysian political landscape for many more years.

The 10th General Elections which I hope will produce the biggest turnout of voters ever is an opportunity for Malaysians to re-endorse the Government which has saved us from an economic disaster and loss of independence and sovereignty to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the superpower which dictates it.

Send that power on Monday a clear message: No, thank you. We have coped with the near disaster you inflicted on us in our own way. Our economy is now recovering and the Government and Malaysian companies and corporations are again delivering the goods, perks, bonuses and dividends. Besides, we continue to enjoy political stability, peace and prosperity uncomparable anywhere else in the region with the exception perhaps of island-city state of Singapore.

The Malaysian electorate which is accustomed to good services and promises fulfilled can expect even higher rewards, better services and performance by the Government after the polls.

Dr Mahathir is very aware of Malaysians who are so accustomed to ever rising affluence and quality of life. He will not disappoint them. The Government shall try to meet their rising expectations and it understands the need for greater political expressions.

Monday is the greatest opportunity for all Malaysians who can vote to use their rights to return the well-tested BN party which has ruled us since 1955.

Now that the 1997-1998 economic downturn and woes are over, and the horrors of Anwar-caused riots and demonstrations have been left behind, we must let the new government concentrate on development and less politicking.

The Government, especially under Dr Mahathir, for the past 18 years has provided us a high standard of living (attracting two million foreign workers to boot) and made Malaysia an oasis of peace, stability and prosperity above the rest in Asean with the possible exception of Singaporeans who admittedly have annual gross domestic product (GDP) per head higher than us but we are compensated by better quality of lifestyle, varied sports and recreation, space, islands, hill stations and benevolent and tolerant rulers.

The economy will continue to perform well, which matters a lot to a majority of Malaysians, their capabilities shall be enhanced, their access to quality education will be guaranteed and protected but then only if Dr Mahathir wins big on Monday.

I can't imagine tolerant and enlightened Malaysians - the non-Muslims and Malaysian Chinese in particular - want to see modern Malaysia turned into an intolerant medieval Islamic theocratic nation, and risk everything what they now enjoy sans hudud.

We shall remain a plural society with diversity of races, religions, languages and cultures and relatively liberal and secular; more open to the creative entrepreneurship of the Information Age but then again, I must stress, only if Umno and BN remain strong.

You must remember that if a political situation changes, the policies also change - almost always for the worse. Absolutely so in the Malaysian case. Kelantan is a stark example.