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Let us now move on to serious work

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IT appears that there will be no contest for the two top Umno positions. There will be those who would lament over this decision, while others would support such a move. Whatever the argument, it seems quite clear that there is a bigger picture at stake and should take precedence over party politics.

This has to do with the outcome of the last elections.

There is now an emerging consensus that while the elections produced the desired results, it did, however, reveal that the Malays have awakened and are willing to vote against the Government. Many reasons account for this, inter alia, the feeling of being neglected as well as generally being dissatisfied over the ill-treatment of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who the community at the behest of the leadership has hailed as a good leader.

This is not that they support the former DPM over the PM, but rather it is a humanitarian issue. Be that as it may, Umno has a greater agenda, than merely about contests at the top positions. Umno has essentially only four years to regain the trust and confidence of the Malay community.

Pas is doing its utmost to attract the disgruntled Malays and is doing fairly well so far. Indications are that Pas is pushing for a much more people-centred and moderate policies which are popular. This popularity could well spread rapidly over the neighbouring States of Kelantan and Terengganu. There is much that needs to be done by Umno. Party squabbling in Umno is much preferred by Pas.

It seems clear that the Prime Minister is seriously putting smoothly into place the process of transition of power. This is definitely the ultimate sign of a benevolent leader.

Many leaders have refused to retire, resulting in them being forced to do so. Britain's Margaret Thatcher and Indonesia's Suharto are recent examples. By doing so, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will securely secure a special place in the annals of the country's political history, as a leader who thinks of and prepares for the future.

To a large extent, the PM is being magnanimous. The PM has already stated that this will be his last term and what he is essentially presently doing is not to protect himself but rather his successor, ensuring a smooth transfer when the times comes.

This is most noble and contains the signs of great leadership. History is a catalogue of leaders who, having stayed in power for decades, refused to entertain the idea of a successor. The PM has certainly risen to the occasion yet again.

The path is clear for Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to consolidate his position and when the time comes be elevated to the helm of Malaysian politics. It is also gratifying to see the sense of unity and support shown by the top Umno leadership, in particular, the other current vice-president, Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak, who came out in support of the PM's recommendation and that of Abdullah's ascension to the position of deputy president uncontested.

Himself a potential candidate for top position, Najib's stand is most commendable. His support for Abdullah should vindicate Najib from the earlier false perception that he poses a potential threat. He has always been seen as a team player and loyal to the party. As such he has a positive role to play and his leadership qualities should ensure him

higher office in the near future.

Abdullah is indeed the best person to succeed the PM. Personally, not only is he an affable person, he is also seen as a gentleman. He is well liked and he is someone who could reach out to the people, irrespective of race or creed. This strong quality is today a sine qua non in Malaysian politics.

Most important of all, he is a consensus-builder and is acceptable by most sectors of society. As someone who could build bridges across rivers of dissension and discontentment, and over a divided community, Abdullah is the best man for the job.

There appears to be an interesting historical trend amongst our top leaders.

Tunku Abdul Rahman was seen as a leader who, although he achieved independence for the country, was quite contented to rule the country as it was.

Tun Razak Hussein, a hard-working and strong-willed leader, replaced him. Over a short period of time he brought about much changes to the economic and political landscape of the country. He also regained stability for the country. He was indeed a great reformer.

Razak's successor, Tun Hussein Onn, brought a period of consolidation to the country, continuing the good foundation laid down by Razak.

Dr Mahathir's period saw the phenomenal growth of Malaysia, with a new sense of achievement, breaking the mental barrier amongst Malaysians. It has been one roller coaster of achievements and rapid economic triumph.

Abdullah will certainly provide a much-needed period of consolidation, continuing the excellent track record of Dr Mahathir.

The PM is actually overseeing Abdullah, something that is most responsible. As it has been said, the PM's job is no easy job and most do not get the chance of being an apprentice first. In the case of Abdullah this is exactly what is happening. Despite our difficulties, sometimes petty squabbling, the time has come for us to rally behind Abdullah and show that what is important is consensus building and unity for there is a bigger threat looming.

With an experienced and dedicated team, imbued with a strong sense of professionalism, he will be the leader who can breach the gap and lacunae that exists in the country.

We are today beginning to see the emergence of some semblance of an advanced citizenship, where the people are not only aware of their rights but are also in a position to demand for them.

As I have stated on several occasions, this must be accepted as a positive development and the realities of a rapidly developing country. The future challenges are enormous. The credibility gap has to be narrowed and the Government must appear to be a listening Government. There must be much more bottom-up participation and pluralism in the decision making process.

Malaysia is at the threshold of a new era. Before we enter into this, we need to take stock of where we are and where we are heading.

Like most countries that have experienced rapid economic and societal transformation, Malaysia has its fair share of the downside. There are marginalised groups in this country and somehow their plight has been neglected.

We must recognise that there are serious problems out there. We must not deny this nor fool ourselves. We must cease to be engaged in a "feel good" exercise, when the reality is something else.

We are now in the 21st century and the celebrations are over. Most Malaysians would want to see a smooth and stable transition. We are clearly moving towards, and will achieve, this when the time comes.

With the succession issue out of the way, let us now get down to serious work.

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