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Solidarity remains crucial

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THE Barisan Nasional (BN) has won 11 successive general elections (if you include the first general election in 1955), a period of 46 years! How did the BN do it?

By straddling the middle ground. Moderation always wins elections except in Kelantan and, since 1999, in Terengganu, and in Sabah twice. Continue to shun extremists, whether they are Islamic or Chinese, and BN will prolong its rule for a long, long time to come.

There is no change in the concept and position of Malaysia. Malaysian Malaysia has and will always exist because it is and shall always be a beacon of moderation, multi-religious, multi-racial, and there is promise of prosperity and fairness for anyone with undivided loyalty to the King and the country.

If there were doubts about the future, it came from trouble-makers, subversives and prophets of doom.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urges Malaysians to forget our differences, instead to emphasise our similarities. Unfortunately, we tend not to forget our separateness and because of this, everything continues to divide us.

I believe, if common sense prevails, though common sense is not common, the great majority of us will renew and redouble our commitment and loyalty towards a united, just and prosperous nation.

Of course, the practitioners of the politics of exclusion want an exclusive racial and religious hegemony for Malaysia.

We can beat these religious bigots if we have the collective will for national solidarity and determination to enhance goodwill, tolerance and brotherhood.

Through 44 years of Merdeka, our main task is still to consolidate Malaysia against the frontal attack of a section of our own people bent on disrupting the nation as it is constituted.

It depends on whom you speak to but by and large, I think, the Malaysian spirit, especially following September 11, is high. The Government is resolved, very strongly, to forge ahead with progressive and dynamic development towards greater unity, prosperity, tolerance and a happier life for all Malaysians.

The majority of Malaysians are young. I would like to see greater participation by young people imbued with Malaysian idealism in the decision-making process.

At the turn of the last century and for most of the period that followed, politics replaced religion as the chief form of zealotry, as politicians and the majority of people believed politics was a means of improving humanity.

By the 1970s, things had changed. Although the new ruling class was still largely in power, soon many of its numbers became less confident. Not a few fell by the side; the Shah of Iran was a good example. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, the founding PM, was replaced by Tun Razak in 1970.

Malaysia today is Malay majority. The Tunku, Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Onn struggled, with varied success, to build a united Bangsa Malaysia when the racial mix was delicately balanced.

It is arguable whether circumstance or personality shapes events and changes a people. In the case of Malaysia and Singapore, I think, personality determines it. Dr Mahathir has a vision to make Malaysia a

developed nation by 2020. His dream is a Malaysia which will not only survive but prevail by excelling in every field.

Malaysia has everything to achieve what Dr Mahathir has set out for it, but of late we have been confronted with a level of Islamic extremism and Chinese chauvinism we never previously perceived. We must overcome both quickly before they escalate. It does seem nationalism is in vogue in some places and religion in many others.

I must stress that we must free ourselves from complacency that no further efforts are necessary to strengthen national unity. It is a fatal mistake if anyone thinks everything is as it seems. There must be a stronger collective resolve not only to preserve unity but to enhance it.

The task involves everyone. If the middle-of-the-road Malaysian takes things for granted, the Islamic militants who share Pas' dream of an Islamic theocratic state will just overrun them.

The non-Malays must come out openly and work harder to strengthen national cohesion. The moderate Malays must also tender their help, failing which the militant Islamists and their political masters, from within and without Malaysia, whose number is still not huge, will alter what we have achieved over the last 44 years.

This is not in the interest of forward-looking Malaysians. National solidarity remains our redemption.

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