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Now, reps must go to the ground

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MEMBERS of Parliament elected on Sunday have started visiting the poverty and hardship-stricken and providing aid. Assemblymen have started visiting fire victims, trying to ease their burden.

Just days after the general election, some of the Barisan Nasional's elected representatives are already on their rounds, keeping the promise made in their manifesto and by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that they would serve.

People can say new brooms sweep clean. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that they are on the ground. But to prove the sceptics wrong, such service must be sustained.

Elected representatives have a greater role beyond visiting constituents afflicted by tragedy or natural disasters.

Whether they are from the opposition parties or from the BN, they have an obligation to the electorate that put them where they are.

Kedah's Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain has said that assemblymen and MPs have to have a home in their constituencies and spend at least a few days a week serving their constituents.

The days of MPs returning to their kawasan as and when they please are over because Malaysians are more mature, more knowledgeable and most important of all, this election made them realise they have the power to change.

That power will be exercised more judiciously.

In the case of the BN, the recently concluded election saw Malaysian voters supporting the coalition overwhelmingly because of the hope they saw in Abdullah's promises.

I have stayed in Subang Jaya for almost 14 years and yet I have not seen my MP nor have I heard much about his activities. Fortunately, the Subang Jaya Council has been proactive, providing fairly good service, and constituents have little to complain of except the regular power and water cuts and the horrendous traffic.

My constituency was carved up and I have a new MP now.

I do not know how many people would have voted against the BN had it not been a new person there. I do not know how many people would not have supported the BN had it not been because they were enamoured of Abdullah.

But come next election, if the MPs and assemblymen in our area, or in any other kawasan for that matter, are seen as absentee elected representatives, and if they are not there when we need them, then they would really have a buffalo's hide if they dare even to come and ask for our vote.

There are many young assemblymen and MPs this time. They are idealistic and they are enthusiastic. Sometimes, even the best of us can become lethargic and lazy if the whip is not cracked. Therefore, the Prime Minister has to ensure that he monitors their progress, as he promised, to ensure that if they slacken, they are hauled up.

Maybe they can look at model MPs like the late Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoo; or maybe they do not have to go that far and just look at former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Despite having been prime minister for 22 years, Dr Mahathir never failed his constituents. He would visit them regularly and attend to their problems. On festive occasions, when natural disasters hit, planning industries, infrastructure - he did all that besides successfully taking

the nation forward to what it is today.

Abdullah, too, in his 26 years as MP for Kepala Batas, has hardly failed to visit his constituents, see to their problems and plan and lobby for greater facilities for them.

It was, therefore, little surprise that when the BN got its two-thirds majority, the one name that Abdullah singled out for praise was Dr Mahathir, his predecessor, as the man responsible for laying the foundation for the BN's solid victory in 2004.

The new and the not-so-new BN elected representatives should take heed and learn from this, and not use their new-found positions as leverage for better social positions and datukships, while neglecting those who are their responsibility.

They should use their yearly allocations wisely, planning to ensure maximum benefit to their voters.

Yes, their allowances are not much and maybe the Government should look into that. But they went into it with their eyes open, lobbying to be chosen, and now that they have been selected, they cannot gripe but have to carry on.

Many of them have youth on their side. They can give their energy and time to serve. Again, they should look at Dr Mahathir for inspiration. At 78, he campaigned tirelessly for the BN he believed in and it was a result of his hard work in the past that his successor in the Kubang Pasu parliamentary seat, Datuk Johari Baharom, was elected by a much bigger majority than before.

To people like Dr Mahathir, Tan Sri Tan Chee Khoon, the independent C.Y. Choy and the many who gave selflessly to serve, we take our hats off.

To the newly elected, let's hope you do your job well. We are counting on you. If you let us down, don't count on us the next time.