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Development sans discrimination

THE Prime Minister has reiterated that the Federal Government will continue to develop Kelantan and Terengganu because as constituent States of the Federation they are entitled to the benefits of the economic policies designed to develop the nation as a whole and not just selected pockets of the country. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has had to repeat this non-partisan perspective of the role and responsibility of the Federal Government because the two State Governments keep harping on the alleged discrimination against them. For example, the Menteri Besar of Terengganu Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, in his capacity as Pas president, recently repeated the accusation that the Federal Government has been denying assistance to the two States.

Party politics is one thing, governing is another, as Pas should know only too well, given its difficulties in living up to the promises made in its election manifesto. The lack of development in the two States is plain to see. However, rather than admit its own shortcomings and the fact that it is clueless when it comes to development, Pas finds it politically expedient to pass the buck to the Federal Government. The fact is, although Pas denies that it is anti-development, neither is it for development. It prefers to spend its time and resources on the control of individual behaviour in the name of Islam. In Hadi's view, the most significant economic achievement of the Kelantan and Terengganu Governments has been the cessation in the issue of liquor licences.

If the people of Kelantan and Terengganu believe that by electing a government administered by Pas, they will get their promised reward in the hereafter, they should expect to remain economically backward in the here and now. This would not be because of a deliberate policy by the Federal Government to victimise them, but because of a conscious choice by them to elect a government that is more concerned with setting standards of dress and public behaviour than raising their standard of living. They have been gulled by Pas' insistence on form over substance.