

An opportunity to treasure for the opposition
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The 2008 general election has heralded the arrival of a new era. MCPX

The spectacular election results demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the racial bondage that has imprisoned this country for 50 years has finally begun to disintegrate under the combined onslaught of PKR, DAP and PAS.

percentage of parliament seatsNot only the target of breaking Barisan Nasional's long standing two-thirds parliamentary majority was achieved, but more importantly, the opposition has unexpectedly captured the heartland states of Selangor, Perak, Penang and Kedah, in addition to retaining Kelantan in a landslide.

These achievements would not have been possible, if not for the new ground boldly broken into by the electorates themselves – hordes of Chinese and Indians who never supported PAS before had rushed to vote for the latter, while Malays in unprecedented numbers had voted for DAP.

And needless to say, all the three major races have supported PKR enthusiastically.

It is this willingness to break the racial and religious taboos (which have been instilled into the people by BN) that has opened up a new vista of great opportunity for the nation, made possible through the electorate's newfound wisdom of choosing a government not based on race or religion but on merits.

Henceforth, political parties must fight their battles with sound policies and ideals and records that are most attuned to the welfare of the masses, not by appealing to the primordial instincts of race and religion; as the electorate are clearly discarding the latter for the former.

This will surely result in vast improvement in governance through better selected political leadership.

However, this rosy scenario may come to naught if the opposition parties fail to transcend their differences and work together effectively as a team to transform promises into realities.

Collective leadership

None of the opposition parties has a simple majority in any of the state assemblies of Selangor, Perak, Penang and Kedah, so they have no choice but to form coalitions if they want to rule these states.

percentage of popular votesSince coalition is thrust upon them, they must form a political partnership, and this partnership should logically also extend to states where a partner may have only one seat, namely Penang (PAS: 1) and Kedah (DAP: 1).

The inclusion of PAS and DAP in Penang and Kedah respectively will ensure that policies

made in these states will have taken cognisance of the interests and views of the constituents represented by these parties in these states. Besides, these minor inclusions will help to foster solidarity among partners and minimise dissatisfaction of minority constituents in these states.

A major failure of the BN model of leadership was the over-concentration of power on the leader and the lack of mutual respect and genuine consultation among partners, as the former encourages corruption and abuse of power while the latter will doom the partnership to eventual disintegration through desertion by the victimised partners.

Hence, the opposition parties must genuinely practice collective leadership in the state governments, not only to avoid pitfalls of BN but to ensure long-term flourish of the partnership.

All policies and major decisions must be the product of consultations, not whims of the autocrat.

With the understanding that the leader is but the executor of policies, which in turn are collectively decided, the choice of the leader (chief minister or menteri besar) should not be an oversensitive issue, as long as the decision is collectively made and the candidate is deemed suitable.

Top priority

The main scourge of this country is corruption, which is the root cause of high crime rate and inefficient government which in turn is a contributing cause to economic hardships manifested by stagnant economy and runaway inflation.

We have promised the electorate to wipe out this vice, so anti-corruption measures must be on the top of the opposition agenda. As a start, I propose these two immediate measures:

One, push for public declaration of assets of all elected representatives, with those in PKR, DAP and PAS taking the lead.

All opposition-controlled state governments should include in their official websites a section showing the assets of all assemblypersons.

Pass a resolution to call for these public declarations if BN assemblypersons are reluctant to do so. These asset details should be updated regularly.

Two, make it compulsory for all contracts under state government control to go through open and transparent tendering system: all tenders to be advertised and tender prices announced promptly (including posting in official website) upon closing of tenders. All tenders to be evaluated professionally with known criteria and awarded through the tender board.

Public support crucial

Now that the electorate has given the mandate to the opposition parties to govern these states, the people can help to make these new governments a success by giving them whole-hearted support and constructive criticisms where they are due.

We must not forget that Malaysia has been badly managed for a long time, and it is only through maximum cooperation from the public, that the arduous task of reforming an old and impaired system can be speedily accomplished.

As for the opposition parties, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to demonstrate their competence to take over the helm of the entire country by doing a good job of running these states.

This, I am sure, can be achieved if the leadership of these three parties are willing to put the nation above personal or parochial party interests at all times. And let all adopt the motto: "The nation must always come first, no matter what happens".

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