

# We Will Heal Malaysia's Divisions

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By Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

While I am honored to have been re-elected as prime minister of Malaysia and to have received a 63% majority of the 222 seats in Parliament in our just-completed general election, I am also disappointed that we fell a few seats short of the two-thirds majority we were hoping for.

For those who have in the past questioned the legitimacy of Malaysia's electoral process, the results of Saturday's election are proof positive that our country does indeed enjoy a free, fair and highly competitive democracy.

As there has been much speculation about the implications of our election results, I wish to offer clarity on three critically important points:

First, we have heard the voice of our citizens, and I will dedicate myself, in this second term, to healing the divisions which became evident during the campaign. That will mean developing new and concrete initiatives, not just rhetoric, that bring our people together and ensure that no one is left behind as Malaysia prospers, whether they are ethnic Malays, Chinese or Indians.

Second, we can achieve the above goal because our economy is indeed strong and stable, with a 7.3% GDP growth rate in the last quarter, nearly full employment, more than \$100 billion in foreign exchange re-

serves, and a flood of foreign direct investment in manufacturing and services that last year reached a record \$13.7 billion.

For the benefit of all of our citizens, I intend Malaysia to remain a business-friendly and free market economy with powerful attractions for international investors, who over the past 12 months have included General Electric of the United States, Britain's Virgin Group, and important groups from the Middle East and China.

Third, I intend to protect the stability and security of our nation. For all of our citizens to share in the prosperity and opportunities our economy is generating, we must also continue our work to eradicate crime and corruption. The people's desire for law and order is as important in Malaysia as it is everywhere. The same is true of the need to make additional progress in battling corruption, which is both immoral and distorts competition in free markets.

Although the size of our majority would be considered a landslide in most countries, the fact that it has significantly reduced and we have had setbacks in five of our 13 states indicates that we need to do more for those who feel disaffected. Although some quarters have called for me to step aside, my party has given me solid

support to carry on our nation-building agenda, something for which I am grateful.

As with any election in any democratic country, there is debate, sometimes heated; there can be divisions, sometimes fierce; then people make their own choices and democratic politicians have to live

with the outcome. What matters most is that governments listen as well as lead, and so I will work hard to create more of a national consensus following our national democratic conversation.

We are listening. I know there is discontent among some parts of our commu-

nity. I accept it is our responsibility, as the newly reelected government of *all* Malaysians, to find practical solutions to ease that discontent, to listen to grievances and to seek to remedy them.

I have tried throughout my period in office to bring our country and our communities closer together. I have stood in firm opposition to those who have sought to divide us along racial, religious and ethnic lines. We are all Malaysians and we all must have a stake in building a progressive, united and cohesive country. This has always been my approach to government and politics. It is even more important now.

Some people took the opportunity

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## The prime minister, on Saturday's election results.

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when voting to voice a protest, as can happen in any democracy. We accept the result. That is what democracy is all about. The election results will not diminish for a moment our determination to grow the Malaysian economy, to continue our successful program of poverty eradication and to provide a level playing field for all.

After an election it is right to have a period of reflection; it is not a time for narrow introspection. Malaysia cannot afford a period of sitting back and risk stalling our progress and our economic growth.

We are in a changing global economy which itself is in increasingly challenging times. That is why, just as it is essential that we reflect internally on the lessons from these elections, it is vital that we look outward internationally to face and overcome the global challenges of economics, peace and international security.

Malaysia will continue to offer business-friendly policies and a welcoming environment for investors. I believe that Malaysia will continue its strong economic growth in 2008. Our vibrant economy and proven record of economic growth will help us prosper despite the economic slowdown and uncertainty in the U.S.

What we must now undertake is to move forward as one nation with a renewed sense of a bright future for all.

*Mr. Abdullah is prime minister of Malaysia.*