

# A new Malaysia

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**WITH** the swearing-in of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for a second term as Prime Minister yesterday, the first day in the new political life of Malaysia has begun. This chapter, as the country is deeply pondering, is different in fundamental ways from the one that closed with the dissolution of Parliament on Feb 13.

Firstly, the power of the people's vote was unmistakably demonstrated through the massive swing in the Barisan Nasional's (BN) mandate. The message it conveys is

amplified by the contrast between its best-ever performance in the 2004 election, when the BN secured 91% of parliamentary seats and its worst-ever showing at the next turn, slumping to a relatively weaker 64% control of the Dewan Rakyat.

The BN's loss of its hitherto unassailable two-thirds majority in Parliament is obviously the most prominent effect of this polls reversal. More crucially, however, the sudden sense of empowerment that this has given to the people will undoubtedly encourage

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the public to express their displeasure at any perceived transgressions by those in authority. This lesson will remain fresh in the minds of not just the people and the vanquished, but the victorious as well, and their parties too.

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Secondly, the people's devastating verdict on BN component parties, particularly the MIC, Gerakan, PPP and MCA, will force a re-evaluation of the race-based political formula that has defined the political discourse of the nation since before its birth. This catharsis is

necessary if the nation wants to re-invent its outlook to be in sync with a globalised, interdependent world.

On the side of the alternative coalition, this general election has handed it a priceless opportunity to showcase a brand of liberal governance that its parties have been strenuously championing for a long time. Their wish list encompasses a high level of transparency and accountability, respect for civil liberties, race-blind affirmative action, financial prudence, integrity and separation of powers, among others.

Now that the ball is in their court, the people will be watching their every move with a hawk-like intensity to see that they do not squander this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.