

Time to lead, Mr PM
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COMMENT, June 15 – The time for feeling sorry, betrayed and wallowing in self-pity is over. With a new mandate from the Malaysian electorate and a 44-seat advantage over Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in Parliament, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak should be energised, selling his vision of the future to Malaysians daily and getting on with the job of governing this diverse nation.

After all, isn't this what he has craved for since taking over from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009: his own mandate? Instead, six weeks after the polls, visitors to Putrajaya still paint a picture of a leadership still wondering why the sought-after two-thirds majority was not attained; of a leadership still talking about betrayal by Chinese voters and of a leadership mulling what was not achieved instead what has been gained.

Of course, it is wonderful to own a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Besides bragging rights, allowing for Constitutional amendments in the House, winning two-thirds of the 222 parliamentary seats would have made Najib invincible in Umno.

But let us face the reality here: This is not the Malaysia of the Mahathir era. This is a country where every election will be contested, where the Opposition is packed with solid and charismatic politicians, where a more educated electorate is demanding something more than the Barisan Nasional (BN) formula of developmental politics and where the monopoly of information and news no longer lies with the Government.

Going forward, it is likely that a two-thirds control of parliament will be as at the rare as a gold medal for Malaysia Olympics. In this environment, having a majority of any sort will have to do. Najib and his Cabinet have to understand this fact soon. Because what Malaysians have been treated to post-election is more of the same: strident right-wing rhetoric from Utusan Malaysia, Perkasa and talk about punishing groups of Malaysians who presumably did not vote for the BN.

Completely absent from any discussion has been the concept of 1Malaysia, reconciliation, a plan to rationalise subsidies, the future of GST, a detailed plan to handle prickly race relations.

It is a known fact that within Umno, there is a push to bury the 1Malaysia concept, with many arguing that since many non-Malays did not vote for BN, it is time for Najib to forge ahead with policies which have a strong pro-Bumiputera bias.

There is also a growing consensus within the government that it will be politically challenging to introduce the GST now. And that it will be financially taxing to continue BR1M, the direct dispensation of cash to millions of Malaysians in the run-up to the polls.

We would like to hear what the Najib administration has to say on 1Malaysia, on the future economic direction of the country, on fighting crime.

Malaysians want to see the winners at the polls govern. We dare say even Umno wants to see strong leadership.

In the absence of exuding power and control, there will be endless speculation over disgruntled Umno leaders "testing the PM's resolve", meeting Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and "shopping around for options". Already, there is some suggestion that there are some Umno politicians who won parliamentary seats, but were not rewarded with government positions, are agitating.

And then there is Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad offering his thoughts on the need for a contest for the top position in Umno.

The fact is that Umno respects power and strong leaders. If Najib shows strength and leadership and governs Malaysia without fear, and at the same time marshals a team of influential Umno types around him, he can go into any contest for the president's position with confidence.

As the incumbent party president and the sitting PM, he has powers at his disposal to stay on and fight off any challenge, and govern the country effectively.

But every day spent thinking about what may have been is a complete waste of a mandate.

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