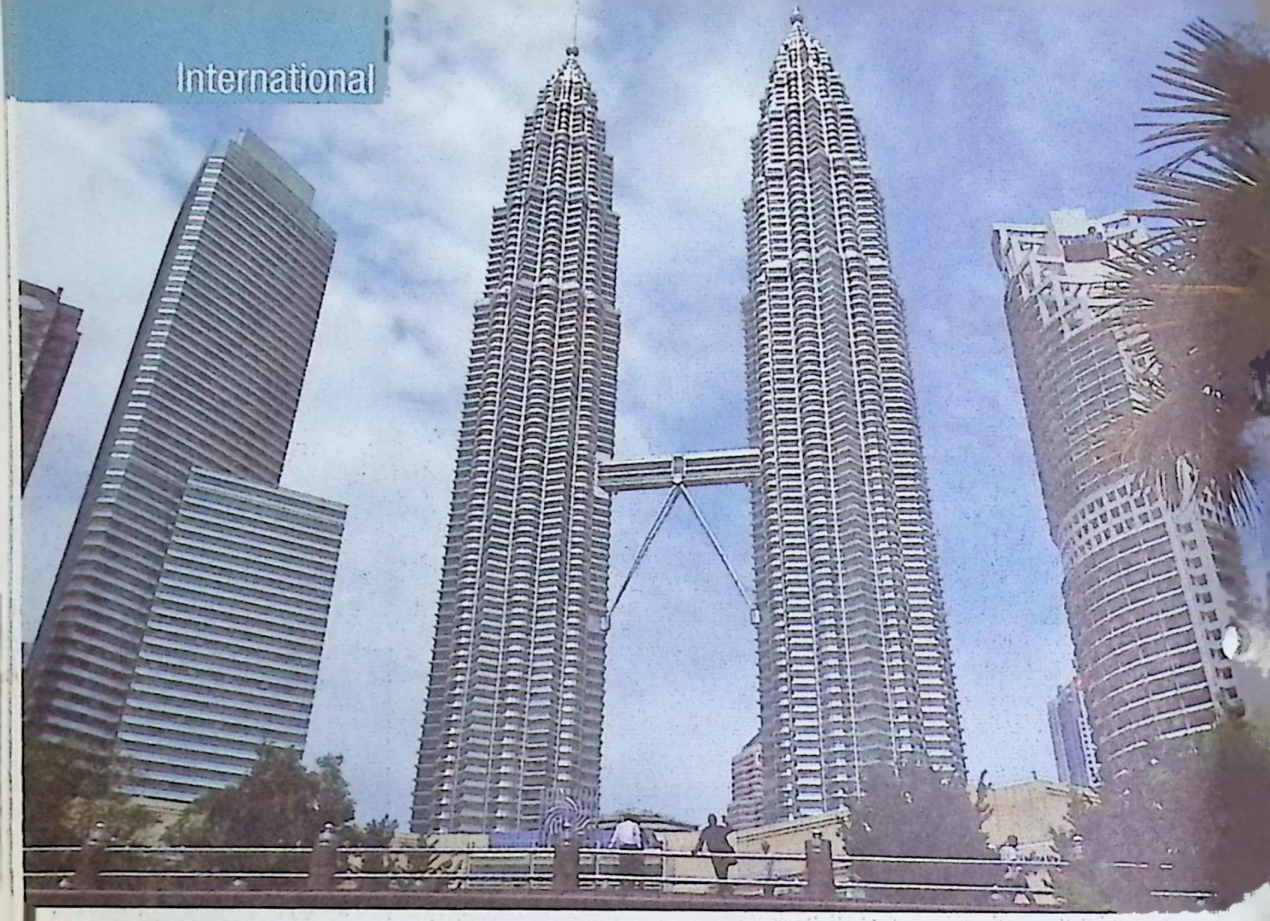


Great Expectations

The last time Malaysia was elected to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), it received an overwhelming 174 votes out of 176 cast. That was 16 years ago.

It was the highest votes among the five countries elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 1999/2000 term. That was also the third time Malaysia won the seat. Previously, Malaysia sat on the non-permanent seat in 1989/90 and 1965.

As Prime Minister Najib Razak starts his working visit to the UN this week to help lobby and secure the non-permanent seat, it is worth remembering that Malaysia achieved its best record in 1998 at a time when the country was undergoing economic and political turmoil. Could Malaysia repeat the feat or perform even better than the last election nearly two decades ago?

It's a tall order. Expectations are high for the current team in New York to perform. At the last count, officials are confident of getting more than 180 votes out of the 193 voting countries.

There are six countries – Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain, Turkey and Venezuela – vying for five seats. The Security Council is the most important UN decision-making body. Five permanent members of the council – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States – enjoy veto power over its decisions.

The 10 non-permanent seats are filled by members of the UN General Assembly, with five countries elected each year to two-year non-renewable mandates. A candidate nation has to win two-thirds of the votes cast in a secret ballot.

Malaysia's candidacy has already received the endorsement of the Asia-Pacific Group at the UN during its monthly meeting in New York in January. Within this group, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has also endorsed Malaysia's candidacy. And of course Malaysia received the full endorsement of Asean.

Still, Kuala Lumpur is not taking any chances. Unlike the last election when retired ambassadors were appointed as special envoys to lobby for votes,