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Sabah gains from moderation

IN his message to the 18th annual delegates conference of Parti Bersatu Sabah, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the re-entry of PBS into Barisan Nasional had brought political stability to Sabah. Indeed, its return to the BN fold after a long period in the Opposition ranks is an endorsement of the politics of moderation practised by the ruling coalition and a rejection of the politics of confrontation pursued at times to extremes by the Opposition front.

The volatile history of Sabah politics with its crippling power plays, political defections, and communal and religious overtones had hindered development and deterred investment. There was also a history of bad feeling between the State Government and the Federal Government. Since the BN took over the Sabah State Government in 1994, there has been a drastic reduction in politicking, a return to economic growth, and better State-Federal relations. The resounding BN victory in 1999 re-affirmed the support for the politics of development and the rejection of the cultural parochialism and religious extremism. As Dr Mahathir pointed out, the move by PBS to seek readmission into BN was "a wise and correct one", and Sabah Barisan "is now in a position to carry its role more effectively in bringing progress to the State".

The rotation of the post of chief minister has given the leaders of the three major communities in Sabah a chance to lead the State for a two-year term since 1994, with a slight adjustment made two years ago to the system. What is more important than the rotation itself is the principle of power-sharing among the major communities that lies at the heart of the spirit of give-and-take that infuses the Sabah Barisan.

The BN national formula is designed to give all communities a chance to be represented in the running of the country. This principle is also at work in efforts to redress the ethnic balance in, say, the police force. In the interest of national unity, the multi-ethnic character of the nation should be reflected in every sphere of life.