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Striking the right balance

THE absence of a power struggle, the smooth leadership transition and the continuity in policies when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi takes over as Prime Minister from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad are testimony to the consensual and consultative politics practised by the component parties of the Barisan Nasional. From the original three-party Alliance to the present 14-party BN, the ruling coalition has not deviated from its power-sharing formula where all the ethnic groups receive fair treatment, regardless of size. No component party gets all it wants, there is a spirit of give-and-take, and every race gets its fair share of political power and the economic cake. The emphasis has always been for all the races to work closely together.

As Dr Mahathir pointed out at the BN's 50th anniversary on Saturday, coalitions elsewhere are usually post-election marriages of convenience necessitated by the absence of a party with enough seats to form a government. As a result, these coalitions tend to be weak and unstable, liable to collapse at any time, unlike the BN which has won big majorities in every general election and has been able to form strong and stable governments.

Dr Mahathir has said elsewhere that the policy of the BN has not been the assimilation of the races but of their integration, where all the races will maintain their characteristics, culture, language and religion. Since the BN formula of power-sharing and its policy of national integration have worked well over the last 50 years and brought peace and prosperity, Dr Mahathir has said that it "has no plans to transform the coalition into a single multiracial party".

The scales, the BN symbol, say it all: balance. It is the ability to strike the right balance between the races while redressing imbalances between them, and to carry out the delicate balancing act of reaching agreement which all groups can be satisfied with, that has enabled the BN to hold its poise and prevent the nation from losing its harmony over the last five decades. This is why the majority of Malaysian public opinion has been in its favour and will, for the foreseeable future, continue to be so.