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On the stump and on the mend

THE 50th MCA general assembly shows that the party is making good progress in healing the wounds suffered during three years of factional in-fighting that threatened to immobilise the party. The spirit of unity that is resurfacing within the party is welcome news to its coalition partners in Barisan Nasional who had been watching with alarm its protracted leadership struggle. As Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out, "When MCA is sick, Umno becomes ill and Barisan Nasional gets a headache."

Now that the MCA has demonstrated that it is making a good recovery from its ill health, it is in a better position to give the Opposition more than a headache in the next general election and deliver the Chinese votes to the BN.

In countries without democratic experience, the struggle between political factions invariably leads to violence, disorder and anarchy. The ability of the MCA to resolve its internal problems by undertaking the changes which have culminated in the current solution is a reflection of its mature understanding of democracy. Through setbacks and relapses, the MCA has been able to move forward by renewing itself in a democratic fashion.

In the same manner, the BN model has advanced through grafts and rebirths since the original electoral pact between Umno and MCA for the first Kuala Lumpur municipal elections in the early '50s and made official in the first general election in 1955 when MCA and MIC joined Umno under the banner of the Alliance party, and scored a mega landslide victory (51 out of 52 seats), hastening Independence in 1957.

Although pragmatism lies at the heart of the political consensus forged within the governing coalition, it has not been a compromise based on mere expediency. It has always been a coalition able to forge common ground between the opposing needs and interests of the different communities that each component party represents. Each recognises, as Dr Mahathir put it, that no one can get 100 per cent of what it wants.

As one of the original founders of this successful model of political coalition in a multicultural society, the MCA has a duty to its Chinese constituency, as well as to the other communities in Malaysia, to preserve and protect a legacy which has laid the foundations for national unity, political stability, social harmony and economic prosperity.