The stability of Malaysia's consociational democracy is contingent upon two major factors. First is the creation of national multi-ethnic elite accommodation, crystallized in the form of a national grand coalition government representing the interests of the various ethnic communities in the country.

Second is the ability of the national multi-ethnic elite to sustain the support and acceptance of the ethnic group they represent, especially during the elections to ensure a national coalition government. The Perikatan (Alliance) coalition arrangement was formed prior to the 1955 first Federal Election to meet the needs of as well as to fulfill British pre-conditions for Malaya's independence. The establishment of the Perikatan saw UMNO playing the key role as the backbone of the government, flanked by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Association (MIC).

UMNO was established as a Malay response to the proposed Malayan Union Plan by the British in 1946. It was the Malayan Union agenda that helped UMNO to emerge as a formidable political force representing the voice and interests of the Malays. The Malay uprising against the Malayan Union was the greatest Malay nationalists' showdown against the British in Malayan history. Since then, UMNO has been playing a major role in Malaysian politics and government as the 'spokesman' of Malay interests. MCA that was established in 1949 was basically a product of the British effort to isolate the Chinese community from the Malayan Communist Party's (MCP) struggle to establish a communist state.

MCA first came into a political pact with UMNO in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur Municipal elections. Encouraged by their success in the electoral pact, the UMNO-MCA pact was then expanded to include the MIC. With that, the Perikatan (Alliance) party came into being. It was the success of this consociational formula that led the Perikatan to win 51 out of 52 seats in the first Federal Elections in 1955. The Perikatan pact proved a success formula in managing the political salience of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaya, and this convinced the British that Malaya's independence was inevitable.

Since it came to power in 1955, the Perikatan realised that its survival and control over Malaysian government heavily depended on its ability to manage and mediate the prevailing diversity and conflicting ethnic interests in the country. As a result of the May 13, 1969 tragedy that shook the consociational formula, the tripartite coalition of the UMNO-MCA-MIC was seen as no longer viable to sustain excessive politicking and politicization of ethnicity in the country. Razak, who took over the premiership from Tunku Abdul Rahman then ventured into creating a more extensive coalition-building. He broadened the base of the Perikatan in 1974 to include more members from other ethnic groups and political parties.

This resulted in the creation of the Barisan Nasional (National Front) consisting of nine political parties including all major political parties from Sabah and Sarawak. With the creation of the BN, the ruling party emerged stronger and a more stable government was put in place. This subsequently marked a new era in rebuilding consociationalism in Malaysia and the result was the BN domination of electoral politics in the post-1970
period. In spite of the numerous political challenges that confronted the BN after 1970, the coalition survived all the subsequent general elections and its two-third majority in the Parliament remained intact, even during the active period of the Reformasi movement (1998-1999) in response to the dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim from UMNO and the government.

Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who took over the stewardship from his predecessor Hussein Onn in 1981, was the longest serving Prime Minister of the country and arguably the most successful one. The twenty-two years of his administration transformed Malaysia in all dimensions and marked the glorious days of BN rule of the country, albeit a number of political upheavals that had taken place in the country as a result of his high-handed style of leadership both in politics and in managing the government.

Although in the beginning of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s administration in 2003 BN was given an overwhelming mandate by the people in the 2004 general elections, the following election in March 2008 was a severe blow. BN lost its two-third majority in Parliament and five state falls to the opposition which formed Pakatan Rakyat. All the major component parties within BN also suffered major setbacks in the elections, and UMNO was no exception. It was against this backdrop that Mohd Najib Abdul Razak took over the premiership of Malaysia from Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009. After a year in the hot seat, Mohd Najib Abdul Razak has demonstrated his resolve and relentless leadership to revitalize UMNO and BN to stay united in confronting all the political and economic challenges. BN had to face a new realism in the form of the changing political landscape of the country.

The internal problems of BN and UMNO in particular had to be resolved first, while at the same time there was mounting pressure and challenges from the stronger opposition pact. The next general election will be the greatest test for Mohd Najib Abdul Razak and BN. Whether UMNO and BN would be able to regain their political strength before the next election is something that is uncertain. But what is certain is that the political path ahead is not going to be the same as it used to be. There is a possibility of more bumpy ride ahead for BN and UMNO in the prelude to the next election. Thus, BN and its leadership must double their efforts in regaining their strength and the trust of the people.

On the other hand, it is also not going to be easy for Pakatan Rakyat to repeat its previous general election record. In short, the battleground is very much wide open for both BN and Pakatan Rakyat. However, Prime Minister Najib seems to be very determined not to let his party suffer further humiliation. As such, BN has an uphill task in facing the difficult challenges. To what extent BN would be successful is yet to be seen as this would also very much determine the survival and the future direction of the consociational democracy in Malaysia.