Government and Politics in Malaysia

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Contents

Foreword                             i
Preface                               iii
Acknowledgements                      vii
Contributors                          ix
List of Acronyms                      xiii
List of Tables and Figures           xxiii
Map of Malaysia                       xxiv
Malaysian Flag                        xxv

Chapter 1  Society, Politics and Islam: An Overview 1
A Brief History                         2
A Plural Society                       5
A Constitutional Monarchy              7
A Federation                           9
A Parliamentary Democracy              12
A Dominant Party System               15
Civil Society                          15
An Islamic State                       18
Conclusion                             22

Chapter 2  Development in Malaysia: An Overview 25
Development Policies                   26
  Pre-independence Period              27
  Independence to 1969                28
  1970 to the Mahathir Era            31
Selected Development Policies During the Mahathir Era: A Profile 34
  Islamisation Policy                 35
  Vision 2020                          36
Chapter 3  Constitution and Constitutionalism  
Nature and Types of Constitution  
Constitutional Government  
Constitution Making: An Overview  
The Constitution of Malaysia  
   The Rigid Constitution  
Constitutional Government in Malaysia  
Conclusion

Chapter 4  Federalism: Origin and Applications  
The Theory of Federalism  
The Evolution of Federal Idea in Peninsular Malaysia  
Centrifugal and Centripetal Trends  
The Formation of Malaysia, 1963  
Federal Territories  
Distribution of Legislative Powers  
Mutual Delegation of Powers  
Federal Legislation on State Subjects  
Sabah and Sarawak  
Federal Power During Emergencies  
The Federal Character of The 1957 Constitution  
Conclusion

Chapter 5  Real and Nominal Political Executive  
Nature and Functions of Political Executive  
Political Executive: A Muslim Viewpoint  
Political Executive in Malaysia
Chapter 6  The Bicameral Legislature

Legislature in Malaysia: A Brief History 104
Composition of the Parliament 105
  Qualifications 108
Nature and Functions of Parliament 110
The Standing Orders 113
Procedure of the House 113
  Prayers 113
  Administration of Oath 113
  Royal Messages 114
Announcement by the Speaker or President 114
Questions to Ministers 114
Oral and Written Replies 114
Procedure in respect of Questions for Oral Replies 115
Requests to move the Adjournment of the House 115
Obituary Speeches 116
Presentation of Bills 116
  First Reading 117
  Second Reading 117
  Committee Stage 117
  Third Reading 118
  Adjournment Speeches 118
Parliamentary Immunity 118
The Opposition 119
Observations 119
Conclusion 120
Chapter 10 **Human Rights**

Human Rights Defined 191
Muslims and Human Rights 193
Human Rights in Malaysia 194
  - Respect for the Integrity of the Person 196
  - Respect for Civil Liberties 200
  - Respect for Political Rights 203
Government's Reactions to Allegations of Violations of Human Rights 205
Discrimination Based on Race, Gender, Disability, Language, or Social Status 206
The Workers' Rights 209
Conclusion 211

Chapter 11 **Public Administration**

The Administrative Structure 213
Local Government 216
The Civil Service 217
Modernisation and Reform Programmes 219
Trends, Issues And Concerns 222
  - Centralisation 222
  - Elitism and Generalist Posture 223
  - Politics-Bureaucracy Nexus 224
  - Lack of Local Democracy and People's Participation 225
  - Dominant Executive 226
  - Weak Public Accountability 227
Conclusion 228

Chapter 12 **Police Administration**

A Brief History 232
The Structure 234
Chain of Command 235
Contents

The Functions 237
Recruitment and Training 239
Successful Police Strategies 241
The Royal Commission of Inquiry 242
Government Response 243
Conclusion 246

Chapter 13 Military Professionalism and Civil-Military Relations 249

Civilian Subordination of the Malaysian Armed Forces 249
Budgetary Allocation, Training, and Military Professionalism 253
The Military's Role in External Defence and Structure of the Armed Forces 256
The Military's Political Role (if any), and Involvement in Policy Development 258
Capabilities, Training and Development, Command and Control 260
Role of the Armed Forces in Nation-building and U.N. Peacekeeping Missions 261
Conclusion: The MAF in the Context of Malaysia's Political Economy 264

Chapter 14 Foreign Policy 269

The Funnel of Causality 269
The Environment and Decision Making Structures 272
Foreign Policy: Tunku Abdul Rahman 274
Foreign Policy: Tun Abdul Razak Hussein 276
Foreign Policy: Tun Hussein Onn 276
Foreign Policy: Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad 277
Foreign Policy: Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 287
Conclusion 291

Further Reading 295
Index 301
Federalism has been a central aspect of Malaysian history since the establishment of the Federated Malay States in 1895. Ever since the idea of federation was mooted by the British, it has been a subject of intense discussion. The idea went through various stages of centralisation and decentralisation. Finally, Malaya emerged as an independent state in 1957 with a Federal Constitution.

This chapter discusses the various centripetal and centrifugal trends that influenced the federal idea between 1895 and 1957. This is followed by an analysis of the distribution of legislative powers between federal and state governments including the power of the parliament to legislate on certain state subjects. The last section of the chapter discusses the federal features of the 1957 Constitution and shows how these features benefited from the process of evolution that the idea of federalism has undergone since 1895.

The Theory of Federalism

The word federal is derived from the Latin word foedus which means a covenant, compact, treaty, league, or an alliance between states for mutual support and joint action. Federalism assumes that there exist diverse and separate communities who want to unite but they are at the same time eager to maintain their separate existence. Federalism creates a central