GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

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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 6  **The Bicameral Legislature**

- **Legislature in Malaysia: A Brief History**  
  - Composition of the Parliament  
  - Qualifications  
  - Nature and Functions of Parliament

- **The Standing Orders**

- **Procedure of the House**
  - Prayers  
  - Administration of Oath  
  - Royal Messages  
  - Announcement by the Speaker or President  
  - Questions to Ministers  
  - Oral and Written Replies  
  - Procedure in respect of Questions for Oral Replies  

- **Requests to move the Adjournment of the House**

- **Obituary Speeches**

- **Presentation of Bills**
  - First Reading  
  - Second Reading  
  - Committee Stage  
  - Third Reading  
  - Adjournment Speeches

- **Parliamentary Immunity**

- **The Opposition**

- **Observations**

- **Conclusion**
Chapter 7  Judiciary  123
A Brief History  124
The Judicial Structure  126
The Conflict between Civil and Syariah Courts  129
The Judiciary and the Separation of Powers  130
Independence of the Judiciary  132
The Judiciary Crisis of 1988  133
Proposals for Judicial Reforms  135
Conclusion  136

Chapter 8  Political Parties and Party System  139
Political Party and Party Systems  139
Political Parties in Malaysia  141
A Brief History  142
The Alliance  144
Barisan Nasional  145
PAS: The Islamic Party  148
DAP: The Social Democratic Party  150
Other Opposition Parties  151
Coalitions in Malaysian Politics  153
The Opposition Coalitions  155
The Malaysian Party System  157
Conclusion  158

Chapter 9  Elections and Electoral System  161
Nature and Functions of Elections  162
Major Electoral Systems  163
  Plurality Systems  163
  Majority Systems  164
  Proportional Representation Systems  164
  Mixed Systems  165
Elections in Malaysia  166
  A Brief History  167
  Malaysian Electoral System  169
Party System and Voting Trends  172
The Elections  174
Contents

I Evaluating Elections and Electoral System in Malaysia 183
Conclusion 187

Chapter 10 **Human Rights** 191
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** 213
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** 231
A Brief History 232
The Structure 234
Chain of Command 235
Malaysia is unique in that it is the only country that has territory on both the mainland and insular regions of Southeast Asia, known as West Malaysia and East Malaysia. West Malaysia, also known as Peninsular Malaysia, has an area of 131,313 sq km (50,700 sq mi) and consists of the southern portion of the Malay Peninsula and nearby islands. Thailand borders Peninsular Malaysia on the north, and Singapore lies off the southern coastal tip. Peninsular Malaysia comprises 11 states and the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. East Malaysia, with an area of 201,320 sq km (77,730 sq mi) occupies the northern section of Borneo Island, as well as offshore islands. East Malaysia shares Borneo with Brunei, which lies on a small section of the northern coast, and with the Kalimantan region of Indonesia, which lies to the south. East Malaysia consists of the states of Sabah and Sarawak, and the Federal Territory of Labuan. East and West Malaysia are separated by about 640 km (about 400 mi) of the South China Sea, and together comprise an area of 329,758 sq km (127,320 sq mi).

Malaysia is generally accepted by political scientists and sociologists as a divided society, "a society which is both ethnically diverse and where ethnicity is a politically salient cleavage around which interests are opposed for political purposes, such as elections." Divided societies are more prone to polarisation and social conflict. Mauro finds that linguistic diversity leads to a greater probability of political instability, which retards economic

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1 The eleven states are Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Penang, Selangor, and Terengganu.