

MALAYSIA

Introduction

The Federation of Malaysia consists of Peninsular Malaysia (the southern tip of the Asian mainland) and the states of Sarawak and Sabah, which are located in the north of the island of Borneo and are separated from Malaya by 500 miles of the South China Sea. This rather disjointed geographical structure is paralleled in some ways by the variety of the country's peoples, which include Muslim Malays (47% of the population), Chinese (33%), Indians (9%) and various indigenous tribes, primarily in Borneo (9%).

Despite such diversities, the country has established political stability and one of the fastest growing economies in the developing world. Such accomplishments are not only an indication of the political sagacity of the various ethnic leaders, but also an example of the success of pragmatic and sustained economic planning.

Domestic Political Situation

Since its emergence from British tutelage, following World War II, Malaysia has been ruled by a strong coalition (The National Front) of ethnic parties who have succeeded in promoting the aspirations of their respective groups firmly within the political realities inherent in a multiracial society.

The United Malay National Organization (UMNO) is the largest member of the National Front and has sought to achieve the economic betterment of the ethnic Malays. The Malaysian Chinese Association, whose leaders have emerged in part from the Chinese business community (which in turn plays a dominant role in the economy), has attempted to work out a delicate balance within the National Front between an augmented political role and accepting some reduction of its economic influence. The third largest member of the coalition, the Malayan Indian Congress, has represented the interests of the ethnic Indian groups. Only one important political grouping (the Democratic Active Party) has chosen to work in opposition to the National Front, but it has yet to make major electoral gains (it has, in fact, been riven by dissent within its own ranks).

The political parties which form the National Front have been successful in agreeing on principle objectives of power sharing and economic growth. The National Front has pursued policies of strengthening national unity while promoting greater Malay participation in economic affairs.