

elected by and from among the nine ruling sultans in Peninsular Malaysia for a period of five years. Government institutions are patterned along British lines with legislative powers rested in the two Houses of Parliament — the Dewan Ra'ayat (House of Representatives) and the Dewan Negara (Senate). The national executive power is vested in the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

The People

Malaysia's population of 14.2 million is made up of people with diverse ethnic origins — 55 per cent Malays, 34 per cent Chinese, and the remainder primarily Indians. Approximately 85 per cent of the population live in Peninsular Malaysia. The population is growing at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent.

The official language is Bahasa Malaysia (Malay). However, English is widely spoken in business circles and is a compulsory second language in all government schools.

Islam is the official religion of the Malay (Muslim) population. Most Chinese are Buddhist, Confucian, or Taoist. The majority of Indians are Hindu, while a small proportion are Muslim, Christian, or Sikh. Most of the Europeans and Eurasians are Christian. The remaining ethnic groups are animist, Christian, or Muslim.

The population is young with approximately 41 per cent of Malaysians under the age of 14. More than 50 per cent of the people are literate, but there is a shortage of professional, technical and management skills.

Local Customs

As the Malay population is predominantly Muslim and Islam is the official religion, care should be taken to avoid offering food, drink or cigarettes with the left hand. In addition, forbidden foods such as pork and derivatives should be avoided when entertaining and nonalcoholic beverages should be available when offering liquor. It is considered discourteous to refuse refreshment when it is offered, particularly when paying business calls.

Telephoning Muslims between 6:45 and 7:15 p.m. should be avoided since this is the time for evening prayers. It is also advisable to avoid calling on Friday noon, a time when many Muslims are at prayers. During