



BRUCE GALE

MUSA HITAMI

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to present a simple account of the political career of Datuk Musa Hitam, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister. In 1981 Malaysia acquired a Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister whose backgrounds and political styles were considerably different from their predecessors. Since then, several attempts have been made by various writers to trace the career of the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir, and suggest factors which contributed to his rise to power. However, Datuk Musa Hitam's background has received far less public attention. This book sets out to fill the gap by providing an account of the Deputy Prime Minister's political activities since his days as a student leader in the 1950's.

For those unfamiliar with the Malaysian political scene the following explanation is provided:

Malaysia is a multi-racial nation consisting of Malays, Chinese and Indians together with a number of other indigenous groups. Each maintains its own language, religion and traditions. The Malays, who form the largest single ethnic group, are Muslims and predominate in the rural areas. A large number are also employed in the civil service. The Chinese also form a large proportion of the population. They are mostly Buddhists or Christians and have historically been concentrated in the towns and cities as businessmen and professionals. Generally, the Indians work on the rubber estates in the countryside or as professionals in the cities.

Apart from the Malays, the largest concentration of indigenous groups is to be found in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak (formerly British North Borneo). The multiplicity of tribes and languages is too complicated to enumerate here. However, a short list would include the Ibans and the Land Dayaks in Sarawak and the Kadazans, Muruts and Bajaus in Sabah. Together with the Malays in other parts of the country, these groups are

officially regarded as Bumiputras (sons of the soil). The population of the two states also includes a substantial number of Malays and Chinese. Historically and economically there are many differences between Peninsula Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak. Not surprisingly, federal-state relations have sometimes experienced moments of crisis.

After the Second World War an attempt by the British colonial administration to unite the states of Malaya by establishing a single unitary government was hotly opposed by the Malays on the grounds that the sovereignty of the Malay Sultans in the states would be transferred to the British crown. This, they believed, would inevitably result in the country's affairs being run by the more economically sophisticated non-Malay communities. It was at this time that the influential United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was founded by Dato Onn bin Jaafar to protect Malay interests.

As a result of UMNO's agitation the Malayan Union Scheme was replaced by the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948. It guaranteed the special position of the Sultans and the Malays as the indigenous people. In return Malay leaders accepted the principle that non-Malays could obtain citizenship. After 1957, when Malaya gained its independence, the citizenship provisions were further liberalised and the civil service was opened to non-Malays in the ratio of 1:4.

The decision of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) to launch an anti-colonial insurrection in 1948 exacerbated communal tensions. Led by Malaysians of Chinese descent the MCP had become a powerful force during the struggle against the Japanese. However, Malays were generally hostile towards the party because they suspected it of being anti-Islamic. The Chinese middle classes, having come to terms with the Malay aristocratic leadership in UMNO, were also unwilling to cooperate with the communists. After a long struggle the Malayan government was finally able to declare the Emergency at an end in 1960.

The Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition of political parties which ruled the country in the 1970's and early 1980's had its origins in an ad hoc alliance between the Kuala Lumpur branch of UMNO and the Selangor MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) in 1952 to contest the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections. It proved