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**Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics**

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Hussin Mutalib

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*To the memory of  
Abdullah bin Hussin*

## Preface

Perpustakaan  
Unit Penyelidikan Sosioekonomi  
Jabatan Perdana Menteri  
Kuala Lumpur.

THIS book is, in more ways than one, a culmination of some years of observation and research on the issue of 'Islamic reassertion' in general and the revivalism of the Islamic ethos in Malaysia in particular.

I first took a keen scholarly interest in the phenomenon of 'Islamic reassertion' (or 'Islamic revivalism') in Malaysia in 1980 upon registering as a MA candidate at the Australian National University in Canberra. At that time, it was the Australian academics such as Manning Nash, John Funston, Clive Kessler, and Margo Lyon who mostly wrote about the phenomenon. In late 1981, I submitted my dissertation on the theme of 'Resurgent Islam and Ethnic Relations in Malaysia', a study which was later substantially enlarged to cover a wider focus and subjected to a more intensive and rigorous treatment when I decided on my Ph.D. topic. I spent about four years on the study but later recast it to incorporate the factor of ethnicity in the final thesis submission. During the preparation of the study, I had the opportunity to participate in Islamic camps and seminars in many places.

Upon returning to Singapore from my doctoral studies in Australia, further opportunities awaited me in my scholarly pursuit of trying to fathom the Faith and its multifaceted characteristics, particularly its relationship with politics. For about a year I served as the Executive Director of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore and, since 1987, have taught a new course for third-year and honours students at the National University of Singapore entitled 'Islamic Political Thought'. I hope, and believe, that these opportunities and exposure have broadened my understanding of the happenings, meanings, and ramifications of the phenomenon of Islamic reassertion, as well as of how the Faith has become the vortex of life to many Muslims in different parts of the world. It is with the intention of wanting to share my thoughts and perspectives on the matter in question with a much wider audience, that I write this book.

Anyone writing a book on issues relating to religion, ethnicity, and politics is bound to face problems, given the currency, sensitivity, and controversy of such issues. This was precisely the situation in Malaysia at the time of my study. The first problem encountered was the limited availability of certain materials relating to the subject. Despite the impressive array of literature (both primary and secondary) which is stored in the National Archives (Arkib Negara) in Kuala Lumpur, many of the documents, par-