



Malaysia



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth: 1957

Population: 29,717,000 (2013)

GDP p.c. growth: 3.5% p.a. 1990–2013

UN HDI 2014: World ranking 62

Official language: Malay

Time: GMT plus 8 hrs

Currency: Ringgit or Malaysian dollar (M\$)

Geography

Area: 329,758 sq km

Coastline: 4,680 km

Capital: Kuala Lumpur

Lying north of the equator in central South-East Asia, above Singapore and south of Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia is separated by about 540 km of the South China Sea from the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, which share the island of Borneo with Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Malaysian islands include Labuan, Penang and the Langkawi Islands.

The Federation of Malaysia comprises three federal territories (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan) and 13 states (Sabah, Sarawak and the 11 states of Peninsular Malaysia). The peninsular states are the nine sultanates of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor and Terengganu, plus Melaka and Penang.

Topography: Peninsular Malaysia has a mountainous spine (highest peak Gunung Tahan, 2,156 metres) with low plains on either side. In the west, mangrove swamps and mudflats at the coast give way to cultivated plains. Sandy beaches lie along the east coast. The main rivers are the Perak and

the Pahang. Sabah's mountains include Mount Kinabalu (4,094 metres), the highest peak in South-East Asia. Sarawak's highest mountain is Murud (2,385 metres), its main river the Rejang.

Climate: Tropical, with heavy annual rainfall and high humidity. The daily temperature throughout Malaysia varies from 21–32°C. In Kuala Lumpur, April and May are the hottest months, December the coldest and April the wettest.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are deforestation; air pollution by industrial and motor emissions; water pollution by raw sewage; and smoke or haze from Indonesian forest fires.

Vegetation: Intensive logging and replanting operations are gradually changing the forest's form. Most cleared areas are in the north-east and west of Peninsular Malaysia. Huge tracts of Sabah's forests were felled in the 1970s and 1980s; the government is trying to curb logging. Forest covers 62 per cent of the land area, having declined at 0.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. Arable land comprises three per cent and permanent cropland 20 per cent of the total land area.

Wildlife: East Malaysia has one of the largest and most varied bird populations in the world, including many species of parrots, hornbills and broadbills. The endangered orangutan, the proboscis monkey and massive wild ox, the seladang or Malayan gaur, also occur. In the country as a whole 70 mammal species and 42 bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

Main towns/conurbations: Kuala Lumpur (capital, pop. 1.48m in 2010), Subang Jaya (Selangor, contiguous with Kuala Lumpur, 1.55m), Kelang (Selangor, 1.11m), Johor

Baharu (Johor, 916,400), Ampang Jaya (Selangor, 804,900), Ipoh (Perak, 704,600), Shah Alam (Selangor, 671,300), Kuching (Sarawak, 658,500), Petaling Jaya (Selangor, 638,500), Kota Kinabalu (Sabah, 604,100), Batu Sembilan Cheras (Selangor, 601,500), Sandakan (Sabah, 501,200), Kajang Sungai Chua (Selangor, 448,200), Seremban (Negeri Sembilan, 439,300), Kuantan (Pahang, 422,000), Tawau (Sabah, 381,700), Kuala Terengganu (Terengganu, 286,300), Miri (280,500), Kota Bharu (Kelantan, 272,600), Bukit Mertajam (Penang, 228,000), Alor Setar (Kedah, 212,600), Taiping (Perak, 212,600), Melaka (Melaka, 201,400) and George Town (Penang, 157,700).

Transport: There are 144,400 km of roads, 80 per cent paved. There is a good network in Peninsular Malaysia including a motorway from north to south. Toll motorways (such as parts of the North–South Expressway) have been built by private groups.

There is a railway network of 2,250 km operated by Malaysian Railway, in Peninsular Malaysia, linking with Singapore in the south and Thailand to the north. Express trains are modern. Sabah has a coastal line; Sarawak has no railway.

Kuala Lumpur's light railway system commenced operations in the late 1990s. It combines underground and raised track and covers the entire city, connecting city centre with airports and suburbs.

Ferry services run between ports on the peninsula and link the peninsula with Sabah and Sarawak. River transport is well developed in the east and the only form of transport in remote areas.

The new Kuala Lumpur International Airport at Sepang, 55 km to the south of Kuala Lumpur, was completed in 1998, in time for the Commonwealth Games. Other international airports are at Penang (16 km south of George Town), Kota Kinabalu (Sabah), and Kuching (Sarawak).

Society

KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 90

Life expectancy: 75 years

Population: 29,717,000 (2013); 80 per cent of people live in Peninsular Malaysia, 73 per cent in urban areas and nine per cent in

urban agglomerations of more than one million people; growth 2.1 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 18 per 1,000 people (37 in 1970); life expectancy 75 years (61 in 1970).

The society is multiracial with an estimated 53 per cent Malays, 25 per cent Chinese, 11 per cent indigenous peoples and ten per cent Indians. In Sarawak, the main indigenous peoples – collectively known in that state as the Dayaks – are the Iban, Bidayuh and Orang Ulu (with the Melanau being early settlers); and in Sabah, the Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau and Murut. Other ethnic groups in Malaysia include Europeans and Eurasians.

Language: The national language is Malay (Bahasa Malaysia), but English is widely spoken. Other languages include various Chinese dialects, Tamil and indigenous languages such as Iban and Kadazan.

Religion: Muslims 61 per cent, Buddhists 20 per cent, Christians nine per cent and Hindus six per cent (2010 census). Islam is the official religion; freedom of worship is guaranteed under the constitution.

Health: Public spending on health was two per cent of GDP in 2012. The entire population uses an improved drinking water source and 96 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). There are 32 medical schools in Malaysia (2014). Infant mortality was seven per 1,000 live births in 2013 (73 in 1960).

Education: Public spending on education was 5.9 per cent of GDP in 2011. There are six years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of three and four years. Some 99 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2009). The school year starts in January and comprises two terms.

The tertiary sector comprises 20 public universities, 22 polytechnics, 37 community colleges, and many private universities and colleges, located throughout the country (2013). The longest-established universities are the University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, 1905) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Skudai (Johor, 1904 as the Technical School, becoming a university in 1972). Open and distance education is provided by the Open University Malaysia, which was established as a private university by a consortium of 11 public universities in 2000. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 1.30:1 (2010). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 98 per cent (2010).

Malaysia hosted the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Kuala

Lumpur in June 2009, which marked 50 years since the first conference was held in Oxford in the UK in 1959. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

Media: All newspapers in Malaysia must renew their publication licences annually. English-language dailies include *New Straits Times*, *The Star*, *The Sun*, *Malay Mail* and *Business Times*. *Malaysiakini* is an online news service.

Public broadcaster Radio Television Malaysia operates two television channels and many radio stations, in Malay, Tamil, Chinese and/or English. There are several commercial TV networks and a number of private radio stations.

Some 95 per cent of households have TV sets (2006). There are 232 personal computers per 1,000 people (2006).

Communications: Country code 60; internet domain '.my'. Public phones are widely available. Mobile coverage is generally good. There are internet cafes in most towns, and many hotels have high-speed internet access.

For every 1,000 people there are 153 landlines, 1,447 mobile phone subscriptions and 670 internet users (2013).

Public holidays: New Year's Day (in most but not all states), Labour Day (1 May), King's Birthday (first Saturday in June), National Day (31 August), Malaysia Day (16 September), Christmas Day, and some local state holidays. Flower festivals are held in most states during a week in mid-July. For most states the weekend comprises a half-day on Saturday plus Sunday, but in Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu half-day Thursday plus Friday.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Chinese New Year (two days in most states), Prophet's Birthday, Wesak Day (Buddha Purnima, April/May), Hari Raya Puasa (Eid al-Fitr/end of Ramadan, two days), Hari Raya Qurban (Eid al-Adha/Feast of the Sacrifice), Deepavali (Diwali, October/November, except Labuan and Sarawak) and Awal Muharam (Islamic New Year).

Economy

KEY FACTS 2013

GNI: US\$301.3bn

GNI p.c.: US\$10,400

GDP growth: 4.3% p.a. 2009–13

Inflation: 1.8% p.a. 2009–13

Malaysia is rich in natural resources and its traditional economic strength lay in commodities. It is still an important source of tin and rubber, produces more than half the world's palm oil and is a net exporter of oil and gas. Reserves of oil were estimated in January 2014 to be 3.7 billion barrels, and of gas, 1.1 trillion cubic metres. Average daily oil production in 2013 was 657,000 barrels.

During the 1980s and 1990s, however, the character of the economy changed radically as it developed into a predominantly manufacturing country focusing on export-oriented electronic and electrical equipment (manufacturing contributed 24.2 per cent of GDP in 2012) but also cars, and a wide range of goods for the domestic market. Manufacturing output grew by more than nine per cent p.a. during the two decades 1980–2000 and 3.4 per cent p.a. 2000–10. Latterly, the services sector, too, has been growing rapidly.

The long-term economic plan is to transform the manufacturing sector from the assembly of imported components to the design and production of original products, with the objective of attaining industrialised-country status by 2020. Priority areas are advanced materials, automated manufacturing, biotechnology, microelectronics/IT and energy technology.

After a brief recession in the mid-1980s, growth was very strong until 1997, when the collapse of some South-East Asian financial markets caught Malaysia in their fall, interrupting its rapid growth and throwing the economy into recession. The economy shrunk by 7.4 per cent in 1998. Demand for exports collapsed, especially demand in Japan for semiconductors; several large development projects were postponed; many

Malaysia on the international stage

Actress Michelle Yeoh, born in Ipoh in 1962, is best known for her performances in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*, as well as for playing Aung San Suu Kyi in a biopic of the Burmese pro-democracy campaigner's life.

Fashion designer Jimmy Choo, famous for his women's shoes, was born in Penang in 1948 into a family of shoemakers. After studying in London, UK, he opened a shoe shop in Hackney and was soon featured in *Vogue*. His early customers included Princess Diana.

Tash Aw was a Commonwealth Writers' Prize regional winner with *The Harmony Silk Factory* in 2006; and Sri Lankan Rani Manicka, who was born in Malaysia, with her novel, *The Rice Mother*, in 2003.

companies experienced difficulties; and unemployment rose. During 1998 the government took measures to stimulate growth and the economy began to grow again in the second quarter of 1999, becoming very strong in 2000, with growth being led by manufacturing.

Exports – particularly of electrical and electronic goods – soared and there was a sharp increase in interest in foreign investment. However, in 2001 the economy again stalled, as demand for the country's exports slowed, picking up again, with rising international oil and commodity prices, in 2002. Strong growth of more than five per cent p.a. continued during 2003–07. Then, with the world economic downturn and fall in global demand of 2008–09, the economy slowed in 2008 and contracted by 1.5 per cent in 2009. But it then recovered strongly in 2010 (growing by 7.4 per cent), continuing at four to six per cent p.a. in 2011–15.

History

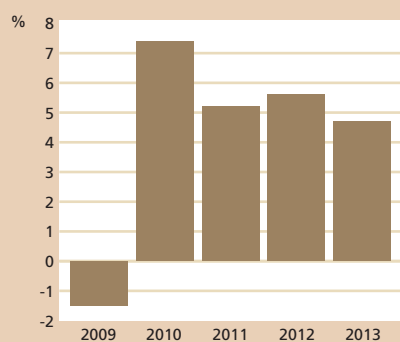
Peninsular Malaysia

In prehistoric times, the region was inhabited by aboriginal people. In the second century BCE settlers arrived from south China. Around the beginning of the first century CE, Indian traders began settling in Kedah and along the west coast of the peninsula. Hinduism and Buddhism were introduced during this early period; the Indian kingdom of Kunan was founded in the first century CE and Buddhist states developed to the east. The Javanese controlled the peninsula around 1330–50. The port of Malacca was founded in the 15th century; its rulers converted to Islam and traded with Muslim merchants, and Islam replaced Buddhism across present-day Malaysia.

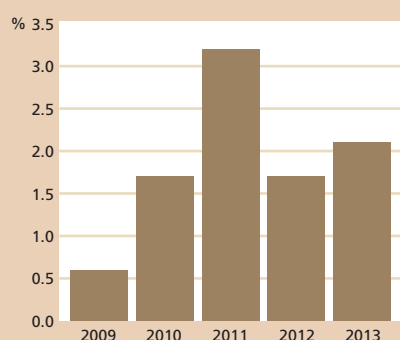
The Sultanate of Malacca was seized by the Portuguese in 1511 but, a century later, they were driven out by the Dutch in alliance with the Sultan of Johor. The peninsula then became a Malay kingdom ruled by Johor. In 1786 the Sultan of Kedah granted the island of Penang to the British East India Company for use as a trading post; less than a decade later, the British took Malacca from the Dutch. In 1819 the British also acquired Singapore. Penang, Malacca and Singapore were ruled directly by Britain as the Straits Settlements.

By a series of treaties between 1873 and 1930, the British colonial administrators took control of the foreign affairs of the nine Malay sultanates on the peninsula. In 1896 the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak and Pahang) came into existence, with Kuala Lumpur as the capital.

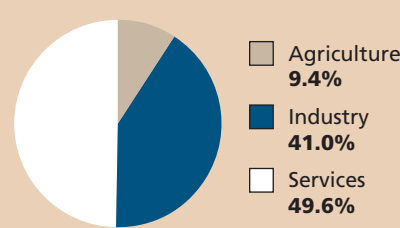
Real growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by sector (2013)



The sultanates of northern Borneo – Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak – also became British protectorates.

Immigrants from southern China and southern India came to work in tin mines and on the plantations, facilitating the peninsula's transition from a trading outpost to a commodity producer. The British introduced rubber farming towards the end of the 19th century.

Reaction to colonial rule began in the early 20th century. In 1915, Indian sepoys rebelled and came close to taking control of Singapore. In 1931, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was established. It had links with developing communism in China and drew most of its support from the Chinese community. By 1937–38, anti-colonial nationalism began among the Malay community, with the formation of the Union of Young Malays.

The Japanese occupied the country from 1941 to 1945. Resistance, mainly from the Chinese, was led by MCP guerrillas. British

rule was reintroduced after the war, but met active resistance from the MCP. Malay nationalists also campaigned for independence. The United Malays' National Organisation (UMNO, the principal Malay party) was formed in 1946.

The Federation of Malaya, comprising 11 peninsular states, was established in 1948. A communist-led insurrection in that year was suppressed by the UK (although guerrilla warfare continued in the north of the peninsula and Borneo and the last insurgents only surrendered in 1989).

A delayed general election took place in 1955. This was won by the Alliance Party, formed out of UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress.

Sabah

Formerly North Borneo, Sabah may have been inhabited since 7000 BCE. From the seventh century CE, the region traded in pottery with China. In the early 15th century the state was ruled mainly by the Sultan of Brunei. In 1847, Britain persuaded the Sultan of Brunei to cede Labuan Island. In 1882 the British North Borneo Chartered Company was established and began administering territory ceded by the Sultan of Brunei and the Sultan of Sulu. In 1888 the territory was made a British Protectorate, still administered by the Company, which also administered Labuan until 1905, when it was joined to the Straits Settlements. From 1942 until 1945 the territory was occupied by the Japanese army. In July 1946 it became the Crown colony of North Borneo.

Sarawak

Archaeological evidence suggests that Sarawak was inhabited from about 5000 BCE. From the 15th century CE, it was ruled by the Sultan of Brunei who, in 1839, ennobled James Brooke, a British adventurer, as Rajah of Sarawak, a reward for his help in calming a rebellion in Brunei. Brooke waged a vigorous campaign against piracy. Sarawak was gradually enlarged with additional grants of land from the Sultan, and the River Lawas area bought from the North Borneo Chartered Company in 1905. Sarawak prospered under Rajah Sir Charles Vyner Brooke (reigned 1917–46), who attempted to set up an elected government in 1941, but the territory was occupied by the Japanese army in the following year. During the Japanese occupation, sickness and malnutrition spread throughout Sarawak. The Rajah, resuming control in 1946, decided that in the interests of Sarawak, he should make a gift of it to the UK Crown. Sarawak became a UK colony in July 1946.

The Federation of Malaysia

Early in 1956, the governments of the Federation of Malaya and the UK and the Heads of the Malay States agreed that the Federation should achieve independence by the end of August 1957 if possible. On 31 August 1957 the Federation of Malaya became an independent nation and joined the Commonwealth. Penang and Malacca became states of the Federation. Tengku (prince) Abdul Rahman, leader of the independence movement, became Prime Minister.

The Malaysia Agreement, under which North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore (but not Brunei) would become states in the new Federation of Malaysia, was signed in 1963 by the UK, Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore. The Federation of Malaysia came into being on 16 September 1963. In 1965, by mutual agreement, Singapore left the Federation and became an independent state.

In the 1969 elections, the Alliance Party lost many seats to the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia and the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party. Amid violent ethnic clashes, the government suspended Parliament and the national operations council ruled by decree for two years. On the resignation of Tengku Abdul Rahman in 1970, Tun Abdul Razak became Prime Minister.

Although Malays formed over half the population, in 1970 they accounted for about one per cent of national income. A 'new economic policy' introduced positive discrimination – in education, civil service, armed services and business – designed to increase the share of the Malay and other *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) groups to 30 per cent of national income within twenty years. After the parliamentary system was restored, the National Front (Barisan Nasional) – a multiethnic alliance led by UMNO – won over two-thirds of seats at all elections of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (and this continued into the 2000s). In 1981 Dr Mahathir Mohamad became Prime Minister.

Malays have dominated the political system since independence, and support in the Malay-dominated rural areas is crucial for political success at the national level. However, to command a parliamentary majority and in the interests of national stability, UMNO has formed coalitions with parties representing other racial groups. Intercommunal relations, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese, have preoccupied governments since independence.

At elections in April 1995, the National Front was returned with a substantially increased majority, winning 162 seats, comprising

UMNO (89 seats), Malaysian Chinese Association (30), Sarawak National Front (27), Malaysian Indian Congress (seven) and Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (seven). The opposition included the Democratic Action Party (DAP; nine), Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS; eight), the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS; seven) and Semangat '46 (six).

In August 1998 Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad sacked his Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, who was subsequently arrested under the detention-without-trial Internal Security Act for holding a political protest gathering without a police permit. He was also charged on several counts of sexual misconduct and abuse of power, charges he denied and said stemmed from a conspiracy to remove him. Anwar was found guilty of corruption in April 1999 and sentenced to six years in prison. In August 2000, he was found guilty of sodomy and sentenced to a further nine years' imprisonment.

In June 1999 opposition parties led by Anwar's wife Wan Azizah Ismail and her new National Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Nasional) formed the Alternative Front (including the PAS, the DAP and Malaysian People's Party), calling for political liberalisation and an end to repressive laws. However, when the elections were held in November 1999, the ruling National Front coalition won 148 seats; the combined opposition parties took 42 seats, with the PBS securing three seats. PAS won control of the oil-rich state of Terengganu and easily retained its hold on Kelantan and, for the first time, assumed leadership of the opposition in Parliament. Wan Azizah won the seat of her husband's former constituency in Penang.

The Alternative Front was, however, divided over the PAS's plan to establish an Islamic state should the Alternative Front win the next elections due by January 2005. Divisions deepened when the party announced it would introduce Islamic law in Terengganu, and subsequently, in July 2002, lost ground to UMNO in by-elections in Kedah State.

In September 2004 Anwar's conviction for sodomy was quashed by the Federal Court and he was released from prison. Then his appeal against his conviction for corruption was rejected, confirming his exclusion from Parliament until 2008.

Constitution

Status: National monarchy

Legislature: Parliament of Malaysia

Independence: 31 August 1957

Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy with a federal constitutional monarch, the Yang di-

Pertuan Agong, as head of state. This monarch is chosen for a five-year term from among their own number by the nine hereditary rulers of Peninsular Malaysia. These rulers also elect a Timbalan (deputy) di-Pertuan Agong. The nine hereditary states are Perlis (ruled by the Raja), Negeri Sembilan (ruled by the Yang di-Pertuan Besar) and Kedah, Perak, Johor, Selangor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan (ruled by Sultans). The head of state in the four states that do not have hereditary rulers – Melaka, Pulau Pinang, Sabah and Sarawak – is the Yang di-Pertuan Negeri, or Governor, and is appointed by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for a four-year term.

The federal Parliament consists of two houses. The upper house, Dewan Negara (council of the nation or Senate), has 70 members, of whom 44 are appointed by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and 26 are elected by the state legislatures (two each). The lower house, Dewan Rakyat (council of the people, more usually called House of Representatives), has 222 members who are directly elected by universal suffrage. The maximum life of the House of Representatives is five years; members of the Senate hold office for six years. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong appoints the Prime Minister and, on the Prime Minister's advice, the cabinet.

Bills must be passed by both houses and assented to by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. A bill may originate in either house, with the exception of a money bill, which may not be introduced in the Senate. The Senate has the power to hold up for one year a bill which is not a money bill and which has been passed by the Dewan Rakyat. Each house regulates its own procedure and has control over its own proceedings, the validity of which may not be questioned in any court. A two-thirds majority of both houses is required before the constitution can be changed.

Politics

Last elections: 5 May 2013

Next elections: 2018

Head of state: Yang di-Pertuan Agong XIV Tuanku Alhaj Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Badlishah (2011–)

Head of government: Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak

Ruling party: National Front (Barisan Nasional)

Women MPs: 10%

In his closing speech to the United Malays' National Organisation (UMNO) annual congress in June 2002, 76-year-old Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced

Further information

Government of Malaysia:	www.malaysia.gov.my/en
Election Commission of Malaysia:	www.spr.gov.my
Parliament of Malaysia:	www.parlimen.gov.my
Department of Statistics:	www.statistics.gov.my
Bank Negara Malaysia:	www.bnm.gov.my
Tourism Malaysia:	www.tourism.gov.my
Commonwealth Secretariat:	www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:	www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Malaysia

Media

<i>Business Times</i> :	www.btimes.com.my
<i>New Straits Times</i> :	www.nst.com.my
<i>The Malay Mail</i> :	www.themalaymailonline.com
<i>The Star</i> :	www.thestar.com.my
<i>The Sun</i> :	www.thesundaily.my
Radio Television Malaysia:	www.rtm.gov.my
Malaysiakini:	www.malaysiakini.com
The Malaysian Insider:	www.themalaysianinsider.com
National News Agency – Bernama:	www.bernama.com

his retirement, but subsequently agreed to continue as Prime Minister until October 2003, when his deputy, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, duly succeeded him as UMNO leader and Prime Minister.

In an early general election in March 2004, the ruling UMNO-led National Front coalition received a strong mandate to proceed with reforms proposed by the new Prime Minister, including action against corruption. It took 199 seats in the 219-seat federal Parliament, regaining Terengganu and conceding only one state, Kelantan, by a small margin to the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). The Democratic Action Party (DAP) took 12 seats and the PAS seven.

The Sultan of Terengganu, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin, became Yang di-Pertuan Agong in December 2006.

In the March 2008 elections, the ruling National Front faced a united opposition at both national and state levels. Although it won in seven of the 12 states contested and took 140 of 222 seats – and 51.1 per cent of votes – in the federal Parliament, it was National Front's worst performance since

1969 and the first time the coalition had failed to attain the two-thirds parliamentary majority required to enact constitutional changes. Opposition parties took 82 seats. Abdullah was returned as Prime Minister. In April 2008 three opposition parties that had worked together in the election, DAP, PAS and the People's Justice Party, formed a coalition, Pakatan Rakyat.

His ban from politics having expired (imposed in April 1999 following his conviction for corruption), former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was elected to Parliament in a by-election in August 2008 and became leader of Pakatan Rakyat.

In April 2009 Abdullah stood down as Prime Minister and UMNO leader. His deputy, Najib Razak (the son of the second Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdul Razak), who had been chosen to lead UMNO at the party's general assembly, was sworn in as Prime Minister.

The Sultan of Kedah, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, who had previously reigned 1970–75, was chosen as Yang di-Pertuan Agong in December 2011.

In national and state parliamentary elections, held on 5 May 2013, the National Front took nine of the 12 states contested, and 133 of the 222 seats – and 47.4 per cent of votes – in the federal Parliament, fewer than in 2008 and again short of the two-thirds parliamentary majority required to enact constitutional changes. The remaining 89 federal seats – and 50.9 per cent of votes – were won by the Pakatan Rakyat coalition. Razak was returned as Prime Minister.

International relations

Malaysia is a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. An international driving permit is required to drive in Malaysia. The wearing of seat belts is mandatory and driving under the influence of alcohol carries heavy penalties.

Scheduled air services link the main towns throughout the country. In peninsular Malaysia the rail network spans the country. In Sabah the North Borneo Railway runs from Kota Kinabalu to the town of Papar.

Kuala Lumpur is served by four rail networks and taxis, minibuses and pedicabs (*trishaws*) are widely available.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include cholera, dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis (risk is minimal in peninsular Malaysia), malaria, rabies and typhoid.

There were 25,715,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.

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