



# “Federalism in Malaysia: Design and Practice”

Penang

15-16 September 2014

*A conference by*

**PENANG**  
INSTITUTE  
making ideas work

*Dear Sir/Madam,*

*You are Cordially Invited to join us at*

*The*

*“Federalism in Malaysia: Design and Practice”*

*Conference*

*Traders Hotel, Penang*

*15-16 September 2014*

*Compliments from,*

*Penang Institute*

**PENANG**  
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Gathering 17 distinguished scholars from diverse academic and professional fields, this conference is an ambitious effort by the Penang Institute to facilitate **the most comprehensive and in-depth debate on Malaysia's federalism** after 51 years. The last comprehensive review on the subject matter is B.H Shaffruddin's *The federal factor in the government and politics of Malaysia* published in 1987.

Federalism in Malaysia had its **foundation laid in 1948** when the short-lived Malayan Union was replaced by the Federation of Malaya. The formation of Malaysia in 1963 did not change fundamentally the institutional set-up except for special arrangements of greater autonomy for Sabah, Sarawak and then Singapore.

Having the same powerful coalition running Malaya/Malaysia since 1955 and running all but five states throughout 49 years before 2008, Malaysia's federalism is **heavily centralised**. Through intra-party control, state governments run by the federal coalition act like **subordinates rather than partners** to the Federal Governments. Meanwhile, state governments ran by federal opposition parties are often **marginalised, discriminated against** or even **overthrown through federally-orchestrated defection of lawmakers**, facilitated by proclamation of emergency rule, selective prosecution, detention without trial and material inducements.

Theoretically, federalism is meant to provide **self-rule** at the state level and **shared-rule** between the Centre and the states, so that the country may gain from the right balance between diversity and national integration and between sub-national competitiveness and equity. In practice, the over-concentration of power at the Centre has denied Malaysia much of the governance benefit from diversity and competition, given **little room for local innovation, initiatives and accountability**. This has arguably contributed at least partially to **deterioration of education quality, under-developed infrastructures and under-cultivated potentials** in most states and chronic communal tension over rigid national policies.

The post-1969 political sea-changes aiming to eliminate the divides in and tighten the control of a multi-ethnic population had basically placed **an electoral one-party state** on the federation. Nearly half a century later, the 2008 political tsunami unveils the unprecedented momentum of democratisation that shakes and shocks Malaysia's centralised federalism as it challenges her electoral authoritarianism. **State interests** such as **petroleum royalty** are advocated vigorously not only by opposition-run states like Kelantan and Terengganu, but also by BN-run states like Sarawak and Sabah. The proposal to implement **Hudud law** at the **state level** is also recently revitalised. Meanwhile, the strong grip of UMNO on its state chapters is increasingly being challenged in states like Terengganu and Perlis.

Democratisation hence poses **imminent questions** to Malaysia's political system.

*We do not have the answers but all of us must ask these big questions now*

- **Can the centralised federalism work** with or after regime change?
- How should the federal-state power relations be revised so that the nation can **reap the benefits of inter-state diversity and competition** while **maintaining or even advancing national integration and regional balance**?
- What are the domains that are over-centralised and need **decentralisation**? And what are those that are under-centralised and need **centralisation**?
- How to get the right mix at various functional domains so that we can have multi-tiered governments with **meaningful self-rule and shared-rule** and **healthy intergovernmental relations**?
- What were the original designs in 1948, 1957 and 1963?

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*The debate is overdue.*

*We hope you will be with us in this thought-provoking  
and exciting intellectual feast!!!*

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For registration, please go to our website at [goo.gl/3Jzpg0](http://goo.gl/3Jzpg0)

# Our Topics

## Overview

1. **Revisiting Malaysia's Centralised Federalism – 1948: 2014**  
by Dr Wong Chin Huat and Dr Francis Hutchinson.

## Functional Domains

2. **Economic Planning** by Dr Lee Hwok Aun
3. **Education** by Dr Toh Kin Woon
4. **Policing** by Mr Nicholas Chan
5. **Housing** by Mr Stuart MacDonald
6. **Healthcare** by Dr Chan Chee Khoon
7. **Transport** by Mr Liew Chin Tong
8. **Land** by Dr Amrita Malhi
9. **Natural Resources and Sustainable Development** by Mr Yin Shao Loong

## Inter-governmental Relations

10. **Kelantan and Terengganu** by Dr Nazli Aziz
11. **Penang and Selangor** by Ms Tricia Yeoh
12. **Perak** by Mr Chan Kok Keong
13. **Johor** by Dr Francis Hutchinson
14. **Sarawak** by Prof James Chin
15. **Sabah** by Dr Regina Lim
16. **First Nations** by Dr Colin Nicholas and Mr Kelvin Egay

## Our Scholars

### Dr Wong Chin Huat.

Fellow and head of the Political and Social Analysis (PSA) Section at Penang Institute, Dr Wong is a UK-trained political scientist specialising in political institutions.



### Dr Francis Hutchinson

Fellow and the Coordinator of the Regional Economic Studies Programme at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Dr Hutchinson's research focus is on governance, federalism, decentralization, and economic policy-making at the sub-national level in the Southeast Asian region.



### Dr Lee Hwok Aun

Senior Lecturer in the Department of Development Studies, University of Malaya, Dr Lee's research focuses on inequality, affirmative action, education, labour, and social policy.



### Dr Toh Kin Woon

Senior fellow at Penang Institute, Dr Toh was a former Penang State Executive Councilor and consultant to various international organisations (e.g. World Bank and Institute of Developing Economies, Tokyo).



### Mr Nicholas Chan

Research analyst at Penang Institute's PSA, Mr Chan is a King's College London graduate in forensic science with particular interest in crime and policing.



### Mr Stuart MacDonald

Fellow and head of Urban Studies section of Penang Institute, Mr Macdonald holds degrees from Sheffield Hallam University and University of Manchester in economic geography.



Dr Chan Chee Khoon

Health policy analyst at the Center for Population Health, University of Malaya, Dr Chan is a Harvard trained epidemiologist specialising in health and social policy.



Mr Liew Chin Tong

Two-term Malaysian parliamentarian, Mr Liew is a political science graduate from Australian National University with a Masters in regional integration from University of Malaya.



Dr Amrita Malhi

Research Fellow in the Hawke Research Institute at the University of South Australia, Dr Malhi is a narrative historian and historical geographer.



Mr Yin Shao Loong

Research director for Institut Rakyat, Mr Yin is also the former policy advisor to the Selangor State Executive Council for Environment, Tourism, and Consumer Affairs.



Dr Nazli Aziz

Lecturer at School of Social and Economic Development, University Malaysia Terengganu, Dr Aziz's research interests include parliamentary studies, good governance and political history.



Ms Tricia Yeoh

Chief Operating Officer of Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), Ms Yeoh was formerly Research Officer to the Selangor Menteri Besar at the Selangor State Government.



Mr Chan Kok Keong

Deeply interested in the history and development of constitutional law, Mr Chan has acted in many highly-charged political cases emanating from the controversial dismissal of Dato Seri Mohammed Nizar Jamaluddin, Menteri Besar of Perak in 2009.



Prof James Chin

Head, School of arts and Social Sciences, Monash University, Malaysia campus, Professor Chin's current research interests include minority rights, elections, democratisation and good governance issues.



Dr Regina Lim

Legal researcher engaged at a local law firm, Dr Lim's research interests include faith movements and citizenship rights.



Dr Colin Nicholas

Coordinator of the Centre of Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), Dr Nicholas specialises on indigenous and Orang Asli issues.



Mr Kelvin Egay

Anthropology lecturer at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Mr Egay's current research interest is in indigenous communities and environment in Sarawak.



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