



The Edge - 28/12/2020 N6

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In national politics, 2020 was as dramatic as it could get. For the first time in Malaysian history, a change of government took place without a general election.

The 22-month-old Pakatan Harapan (PH) government fell in February following a political realignment, dubbed the Sheraton Move, when Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Datuk Seri Azmin Ali led enough MPs out of PH for it to lose its parliamentary majority.

With the exit of Muhyiddin, the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu) president, backed by 26 MPs from his party, and Azmin, the PKR deputy president, leading a bloc of 10 MPs, PH was left short of a simple majority in the 222-member Dewan Rakyat.

The seventh prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad then submitted his resignation, bringing the coalition's rule to a sudden end.

Over the next week, a flurry of conflicting reports emerged from coalition blocs on who they said had the numbers to head the new government. All eyes were on the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as he sought to determine who had the confidence of the majority in the Dewan Rakyat.

In the end, Muhyiddin — as the leader of the new Perikatan Nasional coalition, consisting of Bersatu, PAS and Gabungan Bersatu Sabah — was sworn in as the country's eighth prime minister. Umno remained outside the coalition but pledged to support it and participate in the federal and state governments.

The political realignment soon reverberated through several states. The PH state administrations in Johor, Melaka, Perak and Kedah fell as assemblymen switched to the PN coalition in line with developments at the federal level.

In May, the Dewan Rakyat was opened by the King and adjourned immediately after the royal address. When it convened again in July, Tan Sri Mohamad Ariff Mohd Yusof was replaced as the Speaker by Datuk Azhar Azizan Harun.

In July, Sabah became a whirlpool of political manoeuvrings as both former chief minister Tan Sri Musa Aman and the incumbent Tan Sri Shafie Apdal claimed to have the majority of state assemblymen on their side. A state election ensued in September and the question was settled in Musa's favour.

In September, Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim claimed to have the support of a strong majority of MPs, fuelling talk of another change of government in a tumultuous year. However, despite an audience with the King in October, Anwar's bid for premiership failed to materialise.

As the year drew to a close, Perak experienced another

power shift, when Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu lost a vote of confidence 10 to 48 in the 59-member state assembly. Umno's candidate Datuk Saarani Mohamad was sworn in as the new menteri besar with the consent of PN parties Bersatu and PAS, and with support from PH too.

In parliament, the Supply Bill was passed after all three readings, albeit narrowly, giving respite to talk that MPs could turn the bill into a confidence vote against the PN government.

In these pages, we review how the main players on the political stage fared this year.

## Mahathir's record-breaking run ends suddenly

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's term as the seventh prime minister came to an abrupt end in February when he resigned following the defection of a majority of his party's MPs from the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition.

Following his shock resignation, Mahathir, the world's oldest premier at 94, was appointed interim PM by the King until the next candidate for the post was identified.

Mahathir and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu) president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin tussled for control of the party, leading to Mahathir's dismissal and that of several MPs from Bersatu because they did not sit with the Perikatan Nasional bloc when parliament convened on May 18.

After his removal as Bersatu chairman, Mahathir set up Parti Pejuang Tanah Air (Pejuang) with former members of the party, including his son Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir as president.

Mahathir's alliance with Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, which had faltered over the transition from Mahathir's premiership, fell apart as the two leaders became distanced following their failed attempts to return PH to power.

In May, Mahathir submitted a motion of no confidence in Muhyiddin to parliament, but although it was included in the order paper, government matters took precedence.

In another dramatic development, Mahathir and his old rival for power Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah came together a day ahead of a crucial Budget vote in December to float the possibility of a new government if the Supply Bill were defeated.

As it turned out, the Bill passed its third reading by 111-108, with Razaleigh being the sole abstainer. In the end, Mahathir's no-confidence motion was one of 25 such motions that were submitted, along with two motions of confidence in Muhyiddin — all made academic with the passing of Budget 2021.

## PM Muhyiddin survives a stormy year

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin became the eighth prime minister in March, following a dramatic realignment of political support among members of parliament. Muhyiddin, the president of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu), led his party out of the Pakatan Harapan coalition, causing the government of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to collapse.

Backed by a 32-member cabinet representing the range of power blocs supporting his premiership, Muhyiddin had to cope with the crushing effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy even as he took office as prime minister.

Nevertheless, he gained the public's trust with a series of stimulus packages to ease the hardship of the people who lost their incomes as the authorities restricted movement to flatten the curve of the pandemic.

In a series of live telecasts announcing the government's support measures, Muhyiddin's reassuring manner helped his administration to score points with the rakyat, who were caught up in anxiety over the pandemic.

Several attempts to mount a no-confidence vote against Muhyiddin failed to gain traction, as the PM's backers held together in a balancing act against the opposition.

In September, Muhyiddin received a boost when his Perikatan Nasional coalition and its allies won the Sabah state election. The win put a dent in Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's claim that he had the support of a majority of MPs in the Dewan Rakyat.

The following month, Muhyiddin advised the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah to declare an emergency to prevent the pandemic from spreading. After consulting the Malay Rulers, however, the King decided against it, saying that the government was dealing with the pandemic effectively.

When Budget 2021 was tabled in November, the opposition saw the record RM322.5 billion Bill as a confidence vote on Muhyiddin's government. In the end, the Supply Bill passed all three readings, giving Muhyiddin's premiership momentum into the new year.