



It's just politics

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"WHY did Dr Mahathir quit when he was in a position of power during the Sheraton Move?" I asked Romen Bose, the author of *Shattered Hopes: The Promise, Reality and Collapse of New Malaysia's Pakatan Harapan 1.0 Government*.

I was referring to the move in February 2020 that brought about the collapse of the Pakatan Harapan government that was, at that time, led by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

On the eve of Feb 24, 2020, the day the then Pakatan chairman quit his premiership, I thought he was the most powerful. He was the prime minister and could have picked anyone - MPs, senators, and future senators - to be in his Cabinet. Those not in his good books, such as then DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng and Port Dickson MP Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, could be left out in the cold.

"Read the title of Chapter 1 of my book," replied Bose.

We were seated at a generic cafe in a Kuala Lumpur suburb, and I turned to Chapter 1, eager to see if the author's "why" aligned with mine.

Chapter 1 is titled "The Day PH1.0 Imploded aka Akibat Mahathir Merajuk" (as a result of Mahathir sulking).

Dissecting an insider's view

The columnist catches up with the author of the latest hot political book people are talking about.

"The plan was for Mahathir to now see the King and dissolve the Cabinet, following which Mahathir could set up his new PN [Perikatan Nasional] that did not include Anwar's PKR and the DAP, without having to call for fresh elections

Romen Bose

"Bingo," I said. Bose wrote in *Shattered Hopes*: "The plan was for Mahathir to now see the King and dissolve the Cabinet, following which Mahathir could set up his new PN [Perikatan Nasional], that did not include Anwar's PKR and the DAP, without having to call for fresh elections.

"But I believe that in a fit of pique that his own party was now forcing him to do what he had planned and conspired to do for months, and the fact that he had lost complete control of his party, Mahathir decided to resign as prime minister, as chairman of Bersatu, and chairman of the PH1.0 coalition," wrote the former KL-based foreign correspondent.

"He felt outplayed and outmanoeuvred and so he felt his resignation would be like a poke in the eye not only to his party but also stymie any chance of Anwar or Umno taking power as he believed that he still had a majority of lawmakers backing him and that all sides would eventually clamour for his leadership again."

It was a big mistake by the politician, who many thought was a master strategist, especially as he had become prime minister for a second time. Once Dr Mahathir resigned, I knew he had lost power simply because he was no longer PM.

ROMEN BOSE SHATTERED HOPES

The Promise, Reality and Collapse of New Malaysia's Pakatan Harapan 1.0 Government



On the day of his resignation, I was with a group of businessmen familiar with raw politics. When I announced during that lunch in a hotel in Kuala Lumpur that Dr Mahathir had resigned, one of them said, "Now the King is the kingmaker".

In the next few days, the King interviewed MPs to determine who had majority support. The choice for PM was either Bersatu chairman Dr Mahathir or Bersatu president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

"In order to prevent a takeover by Bersatu, Umno and PAS, the PH presidential council announced that they were to back Mahathir again as their PM candidate. Mahathir then accepted the nomination, saying he had a majority of support and could be appointed as the next PM following the King's assent," Bose wrote.

"But as this was transpiring, Muhyiddin, along with party leaders from Umno, PAS, Gabungan Parti Sarawak, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah, and Homeland Solidarity Party (better known as Star) sought an audience with the King to show him that they had the majority support to form a government."

The author continued: "Although Anwar later rushed to the Palace to inform the King of PH's nomination changes, it was

too late. The Palace issued a statement that evening stating that Muhyiddin would be the country's next PM."

That was the end of Dr Mahathir's political career. The master strategist had lost his political mojo. Eventually, he would form Pejuang and lose in Langkawi to Bersatu during the 15th General Election in 2022.

After reading this bit, I said to Bose: "Why is DAP attacking you? Did they even read your book? I don't see why they are attacking you based on excerpts from your book."

He said they had not, and that the DAP leaders were missing the forest for the trees.

"They should be hitting at Mahathir for spying on them! Their comms people should be cleverer," he told me.

In a comment piece, Bose wrote that he was surprised veteran political leaders would react to headlines. He said they used words like "rubbish" and "hogwash" even though they admitted they had not read the book.

"For the record, *Shattered Hopes* focuses on the alleged machinations of former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad in hijacking a reformed-minded coalition of parties led by PKR and DAP, and who then allegedly sought to destroy the very coalition and partners that brought him into power," he wrote.

I'm 10% through *Shattered Hopes*, and I am looking forward to chapters such as "Asal Bukan Anwar (as long as it's not Anwar)", the "Backdoor Rule" (I wonder what this is about), and "Batu Puteh: Who Cares About Sovereignty Anyway?"

During our chat, Bose gave me his insider view on the Batu Puteh controversy - Dr Mahathir allegedly didn't do all he could to fight for Malaysian sovereignty over that disputed bit of territory when he was PM the first time - and told me why a certain decision was made after a particular leader met a Singapore leader.

I wonder if Bose dared to name this person in his book.