



It's just politics

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IN the “he said, he said” between former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Finance minister Lim Guan Eng, I would like to add my “I said”.

The war of words between former Bersatu president Dr Mahathir and DAP chairman Lim started after excerpts from political consultant Roman Bose’s book, *Shattered Hopes*, were published. The excerpt narrates events after Dr Mahathir and Pakatan Harapan swept into power in 2018.

Lim, who was Finance minister when Dr Mahathir was PM from 2018 to 2020, said the former Pakatan chairman’s views in the book were “riddled with half-truths and falsehoods”.

“Mahathir is an expert in selective memory to paint a favourable picture of himself. While we can charitably attribute such lapses to senility due to his advanced age, his unbridled political ambitions and motivation for vengeance politics compel me to put the record straight,” the DAP chairman wrote in a statement.

As Finance minister, Lim said he had a ringside seat at the commendable start of Dr Mahathir’s second stint as prime minister, when he was intent on delivering on the 2018 Pakatan Harapan General Election manifesto.

“Mahathir openly threatened to sack me three times in Cabinet

Rebutting rebuttals



At loggerheads: Dr Mahathir (left) and Lim are claiming and counterclaiming on social media that there was talk about firing when the former was prime minister and the latter was Finance minister. - Filepics/The Star

meetings,” Lim wrote.

“He was openly riled up by my persistent insistence on reducing the North-South Highway toll by 18% over his strenuous objections.”

Lim added: “He was also opposed to my implementing open tenders for government procurements and granting development allocations to our MPs.”

In a post on X, Dr Mahathir said Lim’s claim that he threatened to sack his Finance minister was a “blatant lie”. The former prime minister said he respected Lim because he was the DAP secretary-general and a Pakatan coalition member.

“I never threatened to sack Guan Eng. That is a blatant lie,” he said. “The only minister I dropped was Maszlee Malik, minister of Education.”

Let me rewind my memory to Dr Mahathir’s premiership from 2018 to 2020.

A few months after Pakatan formed the government, I was already hearing that Dr Mahathir

The drama of politicians countering each others' claims, from the smallest to the biggest 'revelations' is almost a staple in Malaysia's political scene.

was at odds with Lim. Sources inside and outside the government told me that Dr Mahathir had threatened to sack Lim as Finance minister.

With political sources, you sometimes don’t know their hidden agenda in revealing “insider” stories. Some tell you to write a political analysis piece that suits their political narrative. Others reveal information without any political malice or hidden agenda.

There was also talk of a “grand coalition” to replace the Pakatan government. The grand coalition was to put Malay-majority parties - Bersatu (one of the minor parties in the Pakatan government then), PAS, and Umno (both in the Opposition then) - in

power and keep DAP in the Opposition.

When I wrote about this possible scenario for the column, some in Pakatan vehemently denied that there was such a plot. Even days before the collapse of the Pakatan government, just before the Sheraton Move in February 2020, ruling coalition leaders were saying that the government would not fall.

Flashback to what I wrote on Feb 13, 2020: “The elephant in the room in Malaysian politics right now is Pakatan Nasional,” I wrote.

Yes, I made a mistake in the name of the new entity which eventually came to be called Perikatan Nasional. But at the time I got the information, it was

one of the names toyed with by the those behind the plot.

“There is intense talk that a new government is in the making, and it involves almost all parties and MPs except DAP, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and MPs loyal to the PKR president, and Datuk Seri Najib Razak and parliamentarians aligned to the former prime minister,” I wrote.

“Such a plot to replace the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government is clearly present, but there are politicians who ignore the elephant in the room. Or perhaps they are in denial.”

Back then, politicians, especially from PKR and DAP, claimed that the Pakatan government was stable and slammed reports on “Pakatan Nasional”, calling them “fake news.”

“Some of these critics - in their selective amnesia - have singled out *The Star* and *Sin Chew Daily* for even writing about Pakatan Nasional,” I wrote.

“They ignore the fact that the journalists of these two media groups are just doing their job, which is to report what’s happening on the ground.”

In *Shattered Hopes*, Bose also claims that Dr Mahathir was keen on an alliance of Malay-based parties consisting of Bersatu, PAS, and Umno. He writes that Bersatu president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin was tasked with building the new coalition.

“A few factions came up to own the movement and they were now trying to get crossovers and defections using their own ways and tactics, insisting that Mahathir must stay on as prime minister for as long as possible,” Bose writes.

Fast forward to now.

Politics now is not as exciting as it was then. Now, it is not that the unity government is strong, but that the Opposition - Perikatan - is weak. And there is simmering unhappiness among the parties and MPs in the unity government.

Suppose Anwar and his coalition members, such as Umno, Gabungan Parti Sarawak or Gabungan Rakyat Sabah, have a political breakup. In that case, I wonder what “he said, he said” will be revealed.