

When Dr M gave Umno's peace team a 45-minute tongue-lashing

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PETALING JAYA: An Umno delegation led by its president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi received a severe tongue-lashing from Dr Mahathir Mohamad when they sought reconciliation after losing power in 2018, according to a new book on post-2018 politics.

Zahid urged Mahathir to put aside their political differences, and join forces with Umno and PAS, the country's two biggest Malay parties, to strengthen the position of the Malays, who were severely weakened politically when Pakatan Harapan took power, with Mahathir as prime minister.

Quoting sources, the book's author, Romen Bose, said Mahathir appeared "thoroughly incensed" with Zahid's proposal.

"Aides said they have never seen Mahathir so angry before, as he blew up at Zahid and the rest of the Umno delegation. It was as if Mahathir was a father or still Umno president as he was livid and scolded them throughout the entire meeting", Bose writes in his book *Shattered Hopes*.

In a 45-minute tirade, Mahathir dressed them down for siding with Najib Razak and for "destroying Umno and bringing ruin to the Malays", according to Bose.

“He called them bangang (stupid) for firstly having lost the support of the Malays so badly that it ruined the country and secondly for coming up with this proposal as if the slate could be wiped clean just for the sake of Malay unity.”

Mahathir, who was Bersatu chairman, told them there was no way that his party or Pakatan Harapan would accept what he described as a “ridiculous proposal” even though it had the support of all Umno and PAS MPs, according to Bose.

“Mahathir called Umno busuk (rotten) and jijik (nauseating) saying that he would never accept Umno ever again in its current form or as a partner in any way.” He told the Umno delegation that the only way forward would be for everyone in the party to join Bersatu as ordinary members.

However, the entire Umno leadership would be required to declare their assets and allow the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to carry out full-fledged investigations into their wealth. Only if they were cleared by MACC would they qualify to join Bersatu, Mahathir said, a source told Bose.

Mahathir’s plan was for Umno MPs to join Bersatu or face life in the political wilderness, Bose quotes the source as saying.

However, Bose said Mahathir did not hold high hopes of significantly increasing the number of Bersatu lawmakers in Parliament and feared that “realpolitik would force him to accept allegedly tainted individuals”.

Dr M didn't want Anwar to win in Port Dickson

According to Bose's sources, the Umno delegation, Mahathir and his aides discussed the Port Dickson by-election which Anwar Ibrahim was contesting so that he could be a MP and be eligible to be appointed as prime minister.

Mahathir privately could not accept Anwar becoming the next prime minister, although he had publicly voiced his support for Anwar, Bose writes.

"Following the meeting, Mahathir told his aides that Tok Mat (Umno deputy president Mohamad Hasan) should consider running in Port Dickson and win as there was a need to try and stop Anwar from becoming prime minister."

However, it was clear from the discussions that Mohamad was not keen to contest for fear that his campaign may be sabotaged.

Despite the setback at the meeting, Zahid and the rest of the Umno leadership would not take this lying down, Bose writes.

Describing Zahid as a survivor, he said "the fledgling Umno president knew he needed to get his party and coalition back into power and this was something he was totally focused on.

“And then the opportunity struck. It would eventually culminate in what most people now know as the Sheraton Move,” Bose writes.

The Sheraton Move refers to the political machinations that led to Bersatu president Muhyiddin Yassin pulling his party out of the Pakatan Harapan coalition government, leading to the formation of a Perikatan Nasional-Umno government 22 months after the 2018 general election.

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