

Kee Thuan Chye

LIM KIT SIANG

Malaysian First



VOLUME TWO

Bold to The Last Battle



“The fact is Lim Kit Siang could have been a minister. When Razak was forming BN [in 1972], he invited DAP, Gerakan and SUPP to join the coalition. If Lim had wanted to become a minister, he would’ve joined. All those party leaders who joined got to be ministers. But he didn’t even want to be a minister, what more a prime minister.”

— Mahathir Mohamad, *July 2017*

“I remember that sometime in 1979, a relative of mine advised me that it was time for me to retire from politics on the ground that I had already reached the height of what I could possibly achieve in Malaysian politics as an Opposition leader ... My relative’s advice was sound and right, if one was in politics for position’s sake. But I had never entered politics merely to become an MP or State Assemblyman. Getting elected was just a means towards the ends of striving for a just, fair, equal, democratic, united and prosperous Malaysian society.”

— Lim Kit Siang, *February 2000*



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Kee Thuan Chye



Strategic Information and Research Development Centre

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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*This book is dedicated to
my wife, Lim Choy Wan,
and my children,
Soraya Sunitra Kee Xiang Yin
and Jebat Arjuna Kee Jia Liang*





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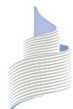
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Preface

IT'S FINALLY DONE — my massive project of telling the Lim Kit Siang story.

Begun in 2019, I've managed to complete it after four years. The first part was published as Volume One in 2021, this second part continues from where it ended.

Volume Two took about 14 months to write — on a daily basis. It is bigger in scope because it covers a longer period of Kit Siang's life and career as well as some of the political history of Malaysia from the 1980s onwards.

The work of producing both volumes has been a labour of respect. Kit Siang is a public icon whose contribution to the nation for nearly six decades is legendary. I strongly felt that it was imperative to make it known widely and for posterity, so I set myself to the task. I hope I have conveyed with truth the complexities of the man and his struggle, and done justice to his legacy.

I must thank Mr Lim for his forbearance and generosity in giving me so much time to interact with him and to assail him with questions that must at times have been too probing and demanding. A few times, he remarked jokingly, even to his colleagues, that he was being “terrorised” and “tortured” by me!

I'm also deeply appreciative that as this biography project is an independent one initiated by me, he has never asked about what I was going to write or given any input on how it should be written. That, in any case, is what I had wanted it to be.

In fact, he had absolutely no idea of what Volume One would turn out to be until I handed him one of the first copies of the published book. The same applies with Volume Two.

I say this to emphasise that all the work I have undertaken for the project has been totally free of influence or interference from anyone or any political party.

Lastly, I wish to attest that having seen Mr Lim up close and personal throughout the duration of this project, I find him to be an endearing person. We shared plenty of laughter together and, occasionally, food and alcohol as well. I cherish those moments with delight.

Most of all, I cherish the fact that I have found myself a friend.

KEE THUAN CHYE

August 2023

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I'm especially grateful to Teresa Kok Suh Sim for helping the most. She provided assistance in various forms, including giving good leads, useful information and moral encouragement.

The others I owe a debt of gratitude to include:

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- All the people — nearly 80 of them — who generously allowed me to interview them for their insights on Kit Siang
- All those who provided photos to help illuminate significant moments alluded to in the book
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- Ivan Tan of Precision Offset Solutions for facilitating the printing of this book
- Dennis Pook for providing moral support

I feel enriched and humbled to have received help from so many people.





So the Malays fear DAP.

I myself had to some extent contributed to the poor reputation of DAP. I portrayed it as an evil party that wanted to control Malaysia and one that did not care about the fate of the Malays. As a result, Malays became afraid of voting for the DAP because if DAP wins, they think Lim Kit Siang will become prime minister.

But when I got closer to them, I found that they were not Chinese-only, like MCA. DAP is multiracial. They have Malays and Indians as well. In their meetings, they speak Malay, the national language. Their party song is also in Malay.

The image I created of DAP was not really true.

— MAHATHIR MOHAMAD
February 2017



CHAPTER 1

Alone, Again

Rumours ran wild on October 27, 1987. Racial riots could break out, they said. Like on May 13, 1969.

Lim Kit Siang set off to search for his son. A few other Democratic Action Party (DAP) MPs went along. They reached the Jalan Bandar Police Station at 5.30pm. But they were barred from entering. Kit demanded to know where Guan Eng was. The police said nothing.

After some minutes, an officer emerged. He pointed to Kit, Karpal Singh and Hu Sepang. “You three can come in,” he said.

“What about the others?” Kit asked.

“No,” the officer said.

Kit, Karpal and Sepang went in. The other party comrades, including Petaling Jaya MP Eng Seng Chai, stood by outside.

Once inside the station, Kit again asked what had happened to Guan Eng. “He was here earlier with Kerk Kim Hock to make a police report,” he said. “Where are they now?”

The police ignored his question.

One officer said, “You just wait.”

So the three of them waited. Half an hour went by. Kit said to Karpal, “I think this is very strange.”

Karpal agreed. He added, “Notice they were specific in choosing the three of us to come in.”

Sepang began to feel uneasy. He had once dared a bulldozer to run him down during a protest. His admirers loved him for his aggressive style. They called him Cowboy for the Stetson hat he wore everywhere, including to Parliament. But this wait at the station filled him with dread. He thought of his wife and young children.

Eventually, at around 7pm, an officer of rank approached. Without preamble, he announced to the DAP men that he was placing them under arrest. Kit demanded to know why. The answer came in three horrid words: “Internal Security Act.” Sepang was stunned. Karpal protested.

The three men were then taken away separately.

Kit was driven to the Sentul Police Station and kept in a holding area. He was subjected to more waiting. When the police had finished processing his arrest, they placed a pair of goggles over his eyes. He couldn't see a thing. They led him out to a Black Maria. Inside were others. But everyone was silent. Talking was forbidden.

Kit was reminded of 1969. His first ISA detention. But he was the lone captive then. And no goggles. He was eventually taken to a police lock-up in Kuala Selangor. This time, the Black Maria took him and the rest to a police remand centre. But where it was located, Kit couldn't tell.

When they arrived, they were ushered to a lock-up area. Each person was placed in a separate cell. Isolated from one another. Once inside his, Kit had his goggles removed.

That very moment, he felt alone, again. Helpless, shut out from the world. Like in 1969. He thought of Guan Eng all the more. He felt with dread that his son must have already been similarly detained. How would the young man deal with the strain and stress?

Kit had actually anticipated the arrest. Although he didn't expect his to be at a police station. Even earlier, he had sensed a crackdown coming. A big operation. Because tension had been mounting in Kuala Lumpur in the preceding weeks. A series of contentious issues had arisen. Become racialised and politicised. Umno Youth leaders bayed for Chinese blood. The racial rhetoric reached near-boiling point.

It could have been controlled, even stopped at source. But it was allowed to continue. Because Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was facing a serious internal power struggle. His party, Umno (United Malays National Organisation), was divided. He was in danger of being toppled. He would want to seize the chance to silence his critics and consolidate his embattled position. He would want to have the outright power to expel his rivals within Umno. And create a party that he could control absolutely. Kit was therefore not surprised that the Barisan Nasional (BN) Government would unleash its lethal weapon — the ISA.

Locked away, however, Kit would have no way of knowing immediately just how big the dragnet would be. And who else would be hauled in for detention without trial. He could only feel a deep foreboding that Malaysia was coming apart. Not just for the immediate term, but for years to come.

He felt that as May 1969 had brought disastrous consequences to the country, so would October 1987. In the days ahead, Malaysians would discover if Lim Kit Siang was right.

In this continuing account of Lim Kit Siang's life and 56-year political career, dramatist-journalist **Kee Thuan Chye** picks up from the cliffhanger at the end of Volume One to present a story full of intrigue, heart-tugging moments, dramatic twists and turns — and even some laughter and joy.

What comes through unmistakably is Kit Siang's resilience in fighting for his Malaysian Dream — his lifelong vision for a united, democratic and prosperous nation in which all citizens will have the opportunity to achieve success and find fulfilment.

We see in this story how he is able to set aside deep-seated political differences and forgive the political enemies who had unfairly inflicted pain and suffering on him — and his son — so that he could realise his Dream.

We also see the important role played by Kit Siang's devoted wife and children in giving him the support he needs as he battles the forces who are set on dividing the nation, stealing from the people and destroying the rule of law.

Malaysia would not be what it is without the political struggles and sacrifices of Lim Kit Siang and his fight for his Malaysian Dream. As this biography shows, he has proven unfailingly throughout his long career that he is not only someone who truly cares for his country and its people, but is also a visionary ahead of his time.



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