

CAPTURING HOPE

The Struggle Continues for a New Malaysia



Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad

Published by
MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd
Level 1, Block A, Lot 1829, Jalan KP3
Kawasan Perindustrian Balakong
43300 Balakong, Selangor, Malaysia
email: mphpublishing@mph.com.my

Distributed by
MPH Distributors Sdn Bhd
Level 2, Block A, Lot 1829, Jalan KP3
Kawasan Perindustrian Balakong
43300 Balakong, Selangor, Malaysia
email: distributors@mph.com.my

MPH Distributors (S) Pte Ltd
No. 12 Tagore Drive, Habitat Warehouse, Singapore 787621
email: sales@mph.com.sg

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Produced by Salt Media Consultancy Sdn Bhd

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Mahathir bin Mohamad, 1925-

CAPTURING HOPE: The Struggle Continues for a New Malaysia /

Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad.

ISBN 978-967-2923-18-3

1. Mahathir bin Mohamad, 1925-. 2. Prime ministers—Malaysia—Anecdotes.
3. Malaysia—Politics and government.

I. Title.

808.882

Printed in Malaysia

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Acknowledgements

The first volume of my memoirs—*A Doctor in the House*—sold quite well. I was not interested in the money. If people read what I wrote, I was satisfied. There were others who started publishing compilations of my speeches and articles too. I had nothing to do with these efforts, and I did not mind it as long as what I had said and written was contributing to debate and discussion.

However, when it turned out that my retirement was more active than most people anticipated, a few of my friends asked me to write a sequel. I resisted at first. I was too busy, especially in the months and years before the 2018 General Election. But they kept pestering me, and finally I relented. Besides, many things have happened in Malaysia since *A Doctor in the House*, and I felt it might be good to set down my account on paper. So, to these persistent friends—you know who you are—I record my thanks.

I wish to thank my daughter Marina, who urged me to publish the rather large number of papers that I have written over the years. These are records of my thoughts and recollections on a wide variety of subjects. Some of these have found their way into this book (in so far as they are relevant to my account), but a large number remain unpublished, so perhaps there will be time for another book after this.

I would like to thank my editors—Rose Ismail, Fatimah Abu Bakar, Caroline Yap Kim Ming and U-En Ng from Salt Media as well as members of their support team, Dayang Miraffiorry and Ridzwan Othman. Salt—there were other key members at the time, Shareem Amry and Sharon Nelson—was also my editorial team for *A Doctor in the House*, and in fact they edited my wife Hasmah's memoirs as well. We spent many hours in discussion and sending manuscripts back and forth as is the way of editors—and yet not once did we meet in real life. This book was written, edited and published during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we did everything online, which is quite different from *A Doctor in the House*, which went through innumerable typewritten drafts.

I give my heartfelt thanks to Tan Sri Badariah Arshad and Ima Abu Bakar, as well as all the loyal and hardworking staff at the Perdana Leadership Foundation, for all the help they have given me.

I also wish to thank my publisher, MPH Group Publishing. I am very pleased that this has been an entirely Malaysian book—written, edited, published and printed by Malaysians in Malaysia.

And to you who now read this book, wherever you may be, I thank you for your interest and attention. May you find something interesting in these pages.

Preface

This book is an account of my side of the story—not just the events leading up to the fall of the Pakatan Government but also what the Pakatan Government stood for and why. It is a very important story that is still playing out. Clever manipulation has resulted in the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) returning to power. Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu) has been displaced as Prime Minister by Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob of UMNO. We must give credit to Datuk Seri Najib Razak for this change.

This book covers my second premiership, from 2018 to 2020, and the months that followed. It was a remarkable time because I found myself on the same side as those who had been my political opponents for decades, and we were united against the coalition that I had led for 22 years when I was Prime Minister the first time around.

I had been President of UMNO as well as Chairman of the Barisan Nasional coalition for 22 years. I was naturally regarded as the main enemy of the Opposition. I had also been accused of practising cronyism, being a dictator and being corrupt—to the Opposition I was the devil incarnate, and some of them really did loathe me. So, when I was chosen by the coalition of Opposition parties as their chairman and candidate for Prime Minister in the 2018 General Election, I was shocked. It was unbelievable, even though none of this had been sudden. It began when I decided to campaign against the Government through a mass declaration by the people. The Opposition parties supported the campaign strongly, and at some of the gatherings I found myself sitting next to Lim Kit Siang, the leader of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), who had been my political adversary for many decades, and who had lambasted me and called me all kinds of names throughout my first term as Prime Minister. But there I was at these functions, sitting next to Kit Siang.

After I formed Bersatu, I realised very quickly that there was no way for us to defeat UMNO and the Barisan Nasional in a general election if we were to contest on our own. After much soul-searching, the Bersatu leadership decided that only through joining the other Opposition parties could we make a positive impact on the politics of the country. And so Bersatu

became part of the Opposition coalition called Pakatan Harapan—the “Coalition of Hope”. I was made Chairman and was named the Pakatan Harapan candidate for Prime Minister should the coalition win the 14th General Election, although this was really due to the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, was in jail. Had he been free, he would have insisted on being named the candidate.

We won. I was then sworn in as the seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia. This also was entirely without precedent in Malaysia; for 61 years after independence, the nation had only known the Alliance and its successor, the Barisan Nasional, as the elected Government. The idea of the Opposition now forming the Government was simply unthinkable to a lot of people.

The installation of the new Government in Malaysia went smoothly. A Cabinet was formed without difficulty and was able to govern effectively. Yes, there were problems, but they were not such as to make the function of the administration impossible. This is not to make light of the actual challenges that we faced, which were enormous.

One of the recurrent criticisms against the Pakatan Harapan was that there were too many non-Malays in it, and that the Chinese-dominated DAP was in control of the country. In fact, the non-Malays were a majority in the Pakatan Harapan campaign. This drove “pro-Malay” nationalists against the Pakatan Harapan. Now, I have spent my entire life and career being “pro-Malay”. If what people mean by that term is the dedication of time and energy towards helping the Malay community progress, especially in terms of education and income security, then, yes, I am certainly pro-Malay. Being pro-Malay does not entail being anti-everyone else. However, there are those who desire to be seen as “Malay-first” even ahead of being Malaysian, and this enabled them to promote the idea of forming a “Malay-Muslim Government”. In Malaysia, where more than 30 per cent of the population is made up of non-Malays, this is not possible. And sure enough, the new “Malay-Muslim Government” of the Perikatan Nasional under Muhyiddin actually depended on non-Malays to survive.

I am a democrat and I am bound to accept the decision of the majority, duly made without coercion or other undue pressure. In these pages I write about how this caused me to be isolated within Bersatu. I was asked to accept the decision of the Supreme Council to leave the Pakatan Harapan coalition and join forces with the parties that we defeated in the elections.

This went against my principles and was not what we had set out to do. I was compelled to resign as Chairman, even if this automatically meant that I would be resigning from the prime ministership. Besides, with some of our MPs jumping to the other side, I expected that the fall of the Pakatan Harapan Government was inevitable. Even if I did not resign, I would have ceased to be Prime Minister when the Pakatan Harapan fell.

This book begins from where I left off in *A Doctor in the House*, but it is about more than politics. Under the Pakatan Harapan, for the first time in many years, our country was being impelled forward through a series of visionary policies. This was the first time since the earliest days of the Alliance in 1957 that a government of hope had come together to try to chart a new path forward. Unlike the Alliance, however, there was no dominant party, no dominant ideology and no dominant existential threat such as Communism. Instead, there was a need to negotiate, understand one another and break down deep-seated mistrust and barriers that had formed over years of political and personal enmity.

I have also included lengthy discussions of three key issues into what is otherwise a chronological narrative. These issues—the Malays, Muslims, and the subject of education and ethics—stand at the centre of the problems we face as a nation today. As such, I hope that they will not be overshadowed by the more political parts of this story.

As this book goes to print, two governments have been formed involving politicians who were rejected by the electorate at the 2018 General Election. The whole democratic process had been turned upside down. Governments can now be formed simply by inducing MPs to switch sides. If this results in an elected Government losing its majority to groups without a popular mandate, then, there is nothing the people can do. Clearly, this is the result of principles not being as important as politics.

Furthermore, the country is still battling the COVID-19 pandemic. From the alarming number of infections to the growing number of people being brought in dead, I do not believe we will see the end of this nightmare soon. The Perikatan Nasional Government has failed in its response to the pandemic. This backdoor Government has no policies for economic recovery or visions for development to bring Malaysia through this crisis. And now it has been replaced by another Government by the same people

but with a new leader. No effective change has taken place. We cannot expect anything better than the failure of the previous Government.

It breaks my heart that people are suffering. It angers me to see how arrogant and insensitive some political leaders are in these difficult times. They seem to have no humanitarian concerns and conscience.

For the record, I did not renege on my promise to the people, whose mandate we, as the Pakatan Harapan, bore. It was never my intention to desert the parties of the Pakatan Harapan that had successfully defeated the kleptocrat Najib by entirely democratic means. At the same time the Pakatan Harapan Government was never a hopeless cause. Far from it. To this day, I believe that the Pakatan Harapan Government of 2018–2020, with our policies and commitment to a cleaner, better future, was the right path for Malaysia. And in the short period it governed the country, it did much to reverse the abuses of the kleptocrats.

We were betrayed.

Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad
September 2021



Chapter 1

Retirement

I had been looking forward to my retirement very much because I had a lot that I wanted to do. So, soon after I stepped down in 2003 as Prime Minister, I set up a non-government organisation—the Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO)—for the purpose of criminalising war. This was a subject that had been very important to me for many years, but I could not pursue it while I was the sitting Prime Minister of Malaysia. In office, my duty was first and foremost to the people of Malaysia and the development of the country's economy and competitive ability on the global stage. This by itself was a full-time job, and I was also President of Malaysia's main political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), and Chairman of the Barisan Nasional coalition that governed Malaysia. There was no time to pursue other dreams while I was Prime Minister, but now that I was retired, I could finally devote my energies to war—and the criminalisation of it.

Can you imagine taking a human life in order to achieve an objective, whatever it might be? In the course of the Second World War, an estimated 70–85 million people lost their lives. There were deaths on every side, among combatants and civilians who had nothing to do with the hostilities. Millions of Jews and others were murdered by the Nazis in concentration camps; millions of people died in the line of fire, in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Dresden and other places around the world. This is just the Second World War alone. There have been so many wars since—it is what humans do to other humans, and it is unfathomably inhuman.

The famed Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz said that “war is the continuation of politics by other means” but what can war resolve that negotiation and diplomacy cannot? If in war you may not win, so also in negotiations you may fail; but just as in war you may have victory, so also through diplomacy may you gain success. Negotiation, arbitration and submission to the judgment of a court of law—this is what human beings should do if they are civilised and seek to resolve their conflicts in peace. To resort to war and death is the instinct of an uncivilised society in which life is nasty, brutish and short. Imagine: you quarrel with someone. What do you do? Pick up a cudgel, or a sword, or a gun and kill him. Is that the kind of society we want? How safe are we in a world that glorifies weapons

and instruments of death? And yet people spend billions of dollars each year producing new and better weapons for us to kill one another with. If that money had been dedicated to medical research, for example, we might already have a cure for cancer.

Murder is a crime. Everyone agrees. But state-sanctioned murder—when the death toll is in the thousands or hundreds of thousands—you’re awarded with a medal and maybe a statue. The misery you cause, the damage that you create, all of it is tolerated because “it is war”. This way of thinking defies logic, especially if we claim to be civilised. Yes, in negotiations, you might not always have a win-win outcome; but in war, you almost always have a no-win outcome. The Duke of Wellington was one of the greatest military geniuses of the modern era, and even he lamented the cost of war: “Nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won,” he wrote, after his great defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo.

2 If you asked a man to kill a baby, would he do it? If he were a normal, sane and decent human being, of course he would not. But when you ask a normal, sane, decent human being who is an air force bomber to drop an atomic bomb on a civilian city in Japan—knowing this will kill not one baby but thousands of people, would he do it? Around 140,000 people died in Hiroshima. Who were they? Men, women, children, babies, sick people and disabled people. All were killed by the hand of civilised, decent human beings. There is something utterly wrong in a world where this can happen, and now that I had retired from politics, I wanted to do something about it.

This was the rationale for PGPO. I had a very clear objective and I needed an organisation that could help push for it. One person writing alone—even a former Prime Minister—would not be effective. With an organisation of people who shared the same beliefs about the evils of war, I believed we could spread the word, have debates and discussions, and engage younger people who would inherit this war-torn world from us. One of the main initiatives we put forward was the establishment of the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Commission in 2007, which we believed was an important avenue for the independent investigation of wartime atrocities, crimes against humanity, and other offences under international law. The keyword was “independent”—we could achieve independence as uninvolved third parties in any conflict. When we have judges from nations that are actually involved in hostilities, it can be very difficult to be impartial and be seen to be impartial. In the international courts, for example, there is always

dominance by one country or bloc. These courts do draw judges from many countries, and we have Pakistanis, Indians, Europeans and Americans heading tribunals, which is very good, but they are still always dominated by the powerful nations. The KL War Crimes Commission was intended to serve as a pioneer on an alternative pathway to show not only that the alternative was possible, but also that it was imperative for humanity to uphold independence and seek justice in the face of power.

The Commission did not have a legal mandate to arrest suspected war criminals or impose penalties—but this was not our purpose. We intended to establish an unbiased public platform that could achieve the moral victory of showing that no matter who you were or how powerful you were, you were still subject to the laws of humanity and there would be people in the world who would call you to account. In our tribunal of November 2011, we found former US President George W. Bush and former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair guilty of crimes against peace in the unlawful invasion and occupation of Iraq. At the time, this verdict was not taken seriously enough, but in 2016 the UK revealed in its own inquiry (under Sir John Chilcot) that Blair did not in fact have a satisfactory legal basis for war in Iraq, and Blair was roundly criticised in the British Press as well as in the House of Commons. Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader at the time, said that the Iraq war was an “act of military aggression launched on a false pretext” and had “long been regarded as illegal by the overwhelming weight of international opinion.” At the time, however, the KL War Crimes Commission received no support or acknowledgement from any government. This is understandable. Governments do not enjoy being judged by neutral bodies because they have no influence or control over those bodies. For example, we can blame Myanmar for its treatment of the Rohingya, and we can also blame the US Government for the number of coups and attempted coups sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency, as well as its role in so many of the world’s conflicts in the 20th and 21st centuries, or even the many deaths of African-Americans at the hands of the domestic police.

3

No comeback as PM

I really wished to see the KL War Crimes Commission develop its role as an independent voice for justice, just as I had hoped to continue pushing for the criminalisation of war. The campaign was gaining momentum, but it would be a long-drawn struggle. There were so many economic interests

involved, from the arms lobby to oil and gas, and more, and I was ready to lead this new initiative for peace at the global level. So, when I stepped down as Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2003, I had no intention of making a political comeback. By that stage, I had served my country for 29 years, including 22 as Prime Minister. I was 78 years old and it was time for younger people to take over. Besides my work with PGPO and the War Crimes Commission, I continued to support the Government, but I did my best to stay out of the limelight. I had an office at the Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF) in Putrajaya, where I spent time crafting speeches for local and international audiences about the need for global peace. The PLF was established after I retired as a place for preserving and developing archives, documents and histories about past Malaysian Prime Ministers and making all this information publicly accessible. The PLF maintains a reference library, for example, which collects and indexes information on the work of all Malaysian Prime Ministers. Following the well-established practice of assisting retired Prime Ministers, the Government rented space in the PLF building for me and a few of my staff.

4 To be honest, I expected to be consulted by the new Prime Minister should there be any problems—I had been at the helm for 22 years and it would have been silly not to make use of that. However, I did not accept the proposal that I should become a “Senior Minister” as the late Lee Kuan Yew had in Singapore. I wanted my successor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to be free to do things his own way—as long as it was clear that it was good for the country.

It thus came as an unpleasant shock when, hardly a week after my resignation, Tun Abdullah cancelled a major national railway project. We had agreed on the double-tracking and electrification of the railway line from Johor Bahru to Padang Besar in Perlis—effectively modernising the central Peninsular Malaysian railway system. Parts of it had already been built, and the cost for completion was RM14 billion spread over six years—i.e., about RM2 billion a year. It was affordable. We had discussed this project in the Government when I was still Prime Minister and we had agreed to do it. I had asked Abdullah to implement the project, and he had promised to do so. I was in Japan when I was told about the cancellation, and I was very upset. It was a necessary project and the cost was reasonable. This was proven later when the segment between Ipoh–Penang–Padang Besar (just over a third of the original length) became necessary and the cost for just this segment alone was RM12 billion.

Tun Abdullah also cancelled other projects that the Government had committed to when I was Prime Minister, and this started to cause antagonism between us. This was not a question of legacy but continuity—as the Government, we had a duty to put forward projects and policies for the public good over the long term. The public, investors, employers, service providers, must all be able to depend on the Government being consistent. Cancelling government commitments, despite Tun Abdullah having been a part of the decision-making process from the beginning, went against all that. Perhaps he had his own reasons for cancelling those commitments but, in any case, I made my objections clear and it was obvious that I would not be accepted as adviser in whatever he proposed to do.

Despite this, I remained committed to the Government of the Barisan Nasional. I had let it be known that I would always be available to help the Government in election campaigns, and just over a year after taking over, Tun Abdullah decided to call for a general election. So, during the 2004 election I spoke at rallies in all states except Terengganu in the northeast of Peninsular Malaysia (the state UMNO leadership had decided not to renominate the late Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Wan Ahmad, who had been Menteri Besar¹ for five terms from 1974 to 1999, and while I agreed with the party's decision, I did not want to hurt his feelings by not supporting him). For my part, I felt that it was important to set an example as a former Government leader. I had always felt that many senior members of the Government (Ministers and Members of Parliament, the various Menteri Besar and state Chief Ministers, etc.) “disappeared” from the stage once they were no longer in office and would make no effort to help the party win. I believed that members who had received strong support from the party before should “pay back” by helping the party during elections. So, at these rallies, I emphasised that Tun Abdullah was a good man and that supporting him was important for political continuity.

5

The election results amazed even me. Under Tun Abdullah, the Barisan Nasional won a 90 per cent majority in Parliament, far more than the two-thirds achieved under me in the previous five elections. Apparently, the people were happy with the change of leadership.

Not long after that, however, it became clear that Tun Abdullah was not equal to the challenges before him. This was a great disappointment to me

¹ “Menteri Besar” is the head of the state government (i.e., the Chief Minister) in Malaysian states ruled by a Sultan.

because he initially seemed to appreciate the rationale behind the many development projects needed to keep the economy vibrant and moving. It was under Tun Abdullah's watch, for example, that the fortunes of Proton, the national car company that I had worked so hard to establish and develop when I was Prime Minister, declined precipitously. It was during this period that Proton sold off, for one euro, the Italian motorcycle company MV Agusta, which it had earlier bought for more than RM200 million. The buyers later sold the company for USD109 million. Tun Abdullah then announced several major infrastructure projects, including the Second Penang Bridge, a monorail for Penang Island and extensions to the Light Rail Transit system in the Klang Valley, among other things. There were also other economic development initiatives for key regions in the country, all of which were set to cost billions of ringgit.

6 While this in itself might have been acceptable, the next four years after the 2004 General Election showed Tun Abdullah to have been partial towards members of his family. His children and his son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar seemed to have unprecedented access to the Government, and it was alleged that they even attended official government meetings. When Khairy contested the post of Deputy Chief of the Youth wing of UMNO in 2004, I heard that a close family member actually telephoned instructions to Youth members to vote for Khairy and not Mukhriz, my son, who was contesting against him. Khairy won.

This was a particularly shameful event for UMNO. Some of my critics said that I did not attend the opening of the UMNO General Assembly that year because my son Mukhriz had been defeated by Khairy, but the real reason I did not attend was because UMNO Youth had directly and openly affirmed the politics of corruption. The Youth wing of the party had spoilt the image of UMNO and the image of the Malays. Money had become more important than the Malay community and the country. UMNO had once been at the forefront of this struggle for decades, and now I felt as if I would be tainted if I participated in a ceremony with so many people who supported corrupt practices. I also wondered why the task of counting the votes of the 790 delegates took more than six hours. Had something been done to ensure the victory of Tun Abdullah's son-in-law?

After Khairy's victory, a number of his friends began to exercise undue influence over the Government. They were ensconced on the fourth floor of the Prime Minister's Office, and a number of complaints were raised

about how the “Fourth Floor Boys” interfered in government business. For example, the state of Terengganu had the biggest offshore oil reserves and stood to gain a lot by way of oil and gas royalties. However, Terengganu was under a Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) state government, which was opposed to the Barisan Nasional at the time, and thus it was decided that the Federal Government would manage the so-called “Wang Ehsan” (this literally means “compassionate fund”) charity. Suddenly there appeared a man, Datuk Patrick Lim, who was not a member of the Government, but who was Khairy Jamaluddin’s business partner. Lim seemed to be so favoured by Tun Abdullah that he became known as “Patrick Badawi”, and he was put in charge of spending the Wang Ehsan. So, he built hotels, the fabulous Crystal Mosque, and many other costly projects including luxury homes for sale to foreigners, a theme park, and more. He also brought a yacht race—The Monsoon Cup—to Terengganu on a five-year contract and all of it was paid for with the Wang Ehsan.

Admittedly, some of these projects were very good, but many were entirely unnecessary and wasteful, eventually leading Terengganu residents to complain that these billion-ringgit projects benefited people outside the state. There was also a flurry of rumours that the contracts went to a single person, and that person was connected to members of Tun Abdullah’s family. Rumours are just rumours, but when they were levelled at a government that was keen to eradicate corruption and promote transparency, then every effort should have been made to debunk the rumours. However, Khairy Jamaluddin, Patrick Badawi and the Fourth Floor Boys seemed to go unchallenged, and Tun Abdullah Badawi started to become quite unpopular as a Prime Minister. At the same time, Malaysia’s economic performance began to lag, and the Fourth Floor Boys soon became the centre of much public criticism.

I was very unhappy about Tun Abdullah’s administration. I found myself unable to accept the open nepotism that was going on, and I campaigned to expose these wrongdoings to no avail. As time passed, however, Tun Abdullah’s Government became increasingly unpopular with the people, and when he called for a general election in March 2008, the results were disastrous for the Barisan Nasional. I had some inkling that the Government would lose some seats, but the extent of the Barisan coalition’s humiliation was far greater than I had expected. We lost five state governments—Penang, Selangor, Kedah, Perak and Kelantan, as well as the majority of parliamentary seats in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Considering

that the coalition had won 90 per cent of the seats in 2004, the losses in 2008 were unprecedented and catastrophic.

It was the last straw, and I resigned from UMNO because the party was no longer the same UMNO that was founded 62 years previously, which had fought for the Malays, Islam and Malaysia—the UMNO that had successfully opposed the Malayan Union, gained independence and later developed Malaysia. I wrote that UMNO under Tun Abdullah had become a party that seemed to exist simply to support him and his family's private initiatives, and had nothing to do with the country and championing the national interest. I said that I would join UMNO again once Tun Abdullah ceased to be party president, Chairman of the Barisan Nasional and Prime Minister of Malaysia. Soon, other UMNO members turned against him. They demanded that he made way for his deputy, Datuk Seri Najib Razak. I was all for Najib taking the helm. I had worked hard to have Tun Abdullah appoint him Deputy Prime Minister.

And so, on 9 October 2008, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi finally announced that he would not defend the party presidency at the UMNO General Assembly in March 2009. This would pave the way for Najib to take over as UMNO President and Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister.

When the appointed day arrived, I attended the Assembly, sitting in the observers' gallery. Tun Abdullah did indeed resign, and Najib was duly elected to the presidency unopposed. I was elated and joined in the applause. The nation was in good hands at last. Najib was the eldest son of the second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, not just one of the most revered leaders of UMNO but someone who had been instrumental in founding the party. Tun Razak was also the chief architect of the New Economic Policy, of Malaysia's rural development programme, and in fact of the Barisan Nasional coalition itself, which had been the model of multiracial and multireligious cooperation for decades. Najib, I thought, was qualified enough and experienced enough for a position of leadership; and as the son of Razak, I felt he would surely be made of the same stuff.

At last, I could enjoy my retirement.

The first years under Najib

On 4 April 2009, the day after Najib took up the reins of Government, I submitted my application to join UMNO again. Filled with optimism



about the future, I said I hoped that others who had left the party with me would also follow me back. Najib welcomed my return, saying it would help with UMNO's rebuilding process. To be sure, there were many who criticised me, asking why I had returned to a party that I myself had accused of being corrupt. When I left UMNO in May 2008 I had said that I would return only when Tun Abdullah was no longer running the country. Now that he was no longer UMNO President and the nation's Prime Minister, my conditions for returning had been met.

However, this did not mean that I was willing to tolerate corruption in UMNO, and at the time I believed that Najib was likely to make more of an effort to eliminate corruption than Tun Abdullah. I certainly hoped he would not choose Khairy Jamaluddin, who had been found guilty of corruption by the UMNO Disciplinary Committee but was still allowed to contest the position of UMNO Youth Chief. Being a member of UMNO also did not mean that I would no longer criticise the party or the Barisan Nasional Government if I saw something wrong taking place.

Najib began well enough. In his closing speech at the 2009 UMNO General Assembly when he was elected UMNO President, he explained that besides controlling the party, the people must also control the Government. Unlike many other UMNO leaders, who seemed to think that the Government belonged to UMNO and that they should "profit" from that relationship, Najib appeared to be of the view that the people had a stake in the Government and therefore could not be ignored. The *rakyat* (the citizens of Malaysia) might not be able to attend the UMNO General Assembly, but they could make their views known at a general election.

The day after Najib became Prime Minister, he went on a walkabout to meet people of various races and walks of life. It was an important move after the increase in ethnic tensions and concerns about rising prices during Tun Abdullah's tenure as Prime Minister. Najib's initial actions were one more reason that made me believe things would improve—but sadly, the new Cabinet he announced on 9 April suggested that some important considerations were being overlooked. The exclusion of Khairy Jamaluddin seemed to show the desire on the part of the new Prime Minister to rid UMNO of corruption. But the inclusion of several other unsavoury characters who had been accused of corruption while serving in Tun Abdullah's Government did not feel right to me. Najib must surely have known that he had less than three years to regain the support of the people—but things did not improve.

In fact, it soon became apparent that Najib was not going to correct the mistakes made by Tun Abdullah's Government. I had expected him to negotiate the price of raw water that we sold to Singapore, as well as the construction of the so-called "Crooked Bridge" to replace the old Causeway linking the island to Malaysia. He did nothing. In fact, he seemed to think of Singapore as a nice place to relax and enjoy himself.

The public, however, were preoccupied with something else—there was an increasing amount of agitation about the conduct and behaviour of Najib's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, with some claiming that she acted as if she were the Prime Minister instead of Najib. Indeed, she insisted on making televised speeches when the country celebrated certain official national days, and a great deal of talk circulated regarding her incredible arrogance. She would be very late for official functions, sometimes arriving long after her husband had arrived. She would be referred to as "First Lady". We do not have a First Lady in Malaysia and the wife of the Prime Minister has never been a formal government office. But then came the very lavish wedding of their daughter with decorations so expensive that guests were barred from bringing their mobile phones, lest they take and circulate photos of the event. There were also reports of extravagant shopping trips abroad, with purchases of jewellery worth millions of dollars.

This was quite disturbing, but I tried to remain on good terms with Najib. When he began his Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (1Malaysia People's Assistance) initiative, I met him several times and tried to point out that public handouts were a bad idea. Handouts encourage financial dependence on the Government when people should acquire the skills and knowledge to earn a living. Government aid should be extended only to those who are unable to fend for themselves. Najib's reply was startling. "Cash is king," he said. This sounded too much like "bribery is okay". Surely the Prime Minister was not advocating bribing people to get their support? I told him that Malay support, especially rural Malay support, could be easily won by going to the *kampungs*, meeting the villagers and shaking their hands. If you could remember their names and ask about their children studying abroad on scholarships, they would be eternally loyal to you. Najib did not believe in this. He believed in big money. He preferred to hand out millions to buy and retain the loyalty of the people.

By the time the 2013 General Election came around, I told Najib that I would continue to support the Barisan Nasional, but if the coalition fared worse under him than it did under Tun Abdullah, then he should resign.



The 2013 General Election and a weaker government

A total of 222 seats in Parliament were contested in the General Election of May 2013. The Barisan Nasional was returned to the Federal Government, winning 133 seats, while the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition took 89 seats. The Barisan Nasional also managed to recapture the state governments of Kedah and Perak from the Pakatan Rakyat, but a closer look at the national results, however, suggested that the Barisan Nasional was in serious trouble. Overall, the Pakatan Rakyat gained a significantly higher proportion of the popular vote at 50.87 per cent compared to the Barisan Nasional's 47.38 per cent. The Opposition also retained control of three states: Kelantan, Penang and Selangor.

After Parliament was dissolved on 13 April 2013, I was interviewed by a BBC journalist. He appeared quite convinced that race-based parties, particularly those in the Barisan Nasional, would be rejected by a more liberal electorate that believed in democracy, freedom and non-racial politics. He also thought that the idealistic young would reject the Barisan Nasional. I disagreed, arguing that racial polarisation in Malaysia had become more pronounced than ever before. After 60 years of involvement in Malaysian politics, I felt strongly that the racial factor would continue to influence the politics of the country and that the quality of the candidates or parties, their respective ideologies and the desire for change, would always be secondary considerations for the electorate.

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Playing on racial sentiments, the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP) drew the Chinese away from the Barisan Nasional by depicting the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA, the principal Chinese-based political party of the coalition) as lackeys of the Malay-based UMNO. The DAP won 38 seats, reducing the MCA's parliamentary representation from 15 seats to seven. Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (or Gerakan, a Chinese-dominated Barisan component party) won one seat out of the two it contested. All the DAP's Chinese candidates had contested in Chinese-majority constituencies, while a few of the MCA, Gerakan and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) candidates had contested in Malay-majority constituencies.

The reality was that although the DAP claimed to be multiracial, it was (and still is) perceived to be a Chinese party with mainly Chinese members and leadership. When the party held elections to its Central Committee on 15 December 2012, almost all the successful candidates were Chinese. For many years, the more extreme faction of the DAP had whipped up

animosity against the Malays through the slogan “Malaysian Malaysia”, implying that non-Malays were discriminated against and were effectively second-class citizens. Advocating their own version of meritocracy, there were some within the DAP who accused the Barisan Nasional of discriminating in favour of the Malays, even those who were less qualified for (and therefore undeserving of) places in universities, scholarships, contracts, licences and positions in the Government. Whenever someone attempted to defend the Government’s policies, he or she (whether in the Government or in a non-government organisation) would be labelled a racist. The Malay parties in the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition seemed to be merely tolerated by this fringe because they were useful for election purposes.

The indisputable fact was that this kind of rhetoric was destroying the political collaboration and power-sharing among the different races that the Barisan Nasional coalition had once sought to promote, and now the schism among the races seemed to grow deeper and deeper each day. By November 2013, I felt I had to speak out more strongly. “The political situation has become unstable because of the perception that the Government is weak and the lunatic fringe now holds sway over politics in the country,” I said in a speech to the Perdana Leadership Foundation:

12 “We have a Government that is weak because of weak support from the people, and with a tendency to accede to the demands of extremists in the Opposition.” The proper response to extremism, I pointed out, was not accommodation because this would result only in more extremism. Political leaders must be firm and reject extremism of all kinds and empower moderates, who are normally voiceless because they are often drowned out or simply afraid of being condemned by the extremists.

By mid-2014 there were a number of people who were reporting to Najib that I was running down his Government. I could not deny that I had repeatedly criticised official policies, but I felt that such criticism was necessary. Governments that are not criticised will soon begin to believe that everything they do is right—if you are interested in knowing what your mistakes are and learning from them, the only way to move forward is to be open to criticism.

Many readers will be familiar with the legend of King Canute and the tide. Canute was a real historical king of Anglo-Saxon England in the 11th century, before the Norman Conquest. The story is that Canute set his

throne down on the beach and commanded the tide to halt before it touched his feet and robes. The tide did no such thing, whereupon Canute told his courtiers: “Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings” before the power of God and Nature. Many historians interpret this as the king’s criticism of the false flattery of the courtiers and a warning not to heed them. There is also the old fairy tale about the Emperor’s new clothes, which I hope needs no introduction at all. Both these stories have the same moral—do not be taken in by flattery.

Malays also have many sayings that guide their lives. I would like to mention this one:

~~Malay I~~

M

Sayangkan anak tangan-tangankan

Sayangkan isteri tinggal-tinggalkan

(These sayings are similar to “spare the rod, spoil the child/wife”).

To which I would like to add:

Sayangkan pemimpin tegur-tegurkan

(Which generally means “spare the criticism, spoil the leader”).

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Malays do not find it easy to criticise leaders. Even when a leader is obviously wrong, no one feels able to criticise him openly—but they will talk behind his back. In this, I find myself to be a little different from other Malays. When Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia’s first Prime Minister, implemented policies and actions that many Malays did not like, I wrote him an honest, open letter and I was expelled from UMNO for my efforts. The Tunku eventually resigned as Prime Minister, perhaps not simply because of my criticism, but the fact is that he did resign. It was the same with Tun Abdullah—perhaps it had something to do with my disapproval, or perhaps because of the Barisan’s abysmal performance in the 2008 General Election, or both, but the fact is that Tun Abdullah resigned. I, too, resigned as Prime Minister in 2003, and part of the reason why I did so was because I was hearing whispers: “When is the old man going to step down?” I believe that if I hadn’t resigned the whispering would have become louder, and then I would have had to resign in disgrace.

Sadly, by 2014 it had become abundantly clear that Najib’s policies and actions were no better than those of Tun Abdullah. Even so, I continued to hope that he would learn from the Barisan’s performance in the 2013

General Election. Unfortunately, there did not seem to be any change in the Government's policies or approach despite the fact that I tried to convey my opinion (which was also the opinion of many others) directly to him.

At that time, I was still a member and supporter of UMNO, and perhaps you might be wondering why.

Darkening skies

Having returned to UMNO, I felt obliged to remain loyal to the party. I wanted to see the party continue to represent, defend and advance the Malays. But I was also aware that UMNO was suffering from a terrible illness. I continued to blog about the need for UMNO to be renewed, particularly with leaders drawn from the younger generation. Unfortunately, there were those who thought my articles had a particular agenda—supposedly, I wanted to return to the leadership through my son Mukhriz. If I had wanted to help Mukhriz, I would have done it when I was Prime Minister and had the ability, influence and power to do so. But I did not—I actually insisted that he stayed out of politics. What I wanted to do with my criticisms and articles was to help restore UMNO and contribute to its future. I myself was not important. UMNO and the Malays were more important than me or my children, although on reflection now, I do not think it was very fair that my children should have suffered because I wanted to preserve my good name.

I believed that if UMNO could be renewed by the young, then it could continue the struggles entrusted to it by the Malays. UMNO members had to be revitalised by the active participation of a vibrant young generation. This was true of the UMNO leadership at all levels, including the Supreme Council. I believed that the members of this august body should also be partly composed of young people. After all, when UMNO was founded in May 1946, its leaders were young—the average age was not even half a century. Many were just in their thirties. They had the mental fitness of young people. They were passionate and had great ambitions for their nation. As a result, UMNO was visionary and effective. The contribution of young people—young UMNO members—to the founding of the nation cannot be overstated. In my articles I urged UMNO to accept more young people into positions of authority in the party. Only in this way, I believed, could UMNO's mission continue into the future.

Yes, being a leader is very satisfying. All amenities can be enjoyed. But many, to paraphrase Lord Acton, are spoilt by the power they wield. Then the abuses begin. Tolerance for criticism diminishes. Warning signs and disregard for adverse information grow. Sooner or later, such leaders become tyrants. Sooner or later, they are overthrown. Unfortunately, many in UMNO were already spoilt and tempted by money. In September 2013, I wrote on my blog that even as little as RM200 could trigger a shift in the minds of some UMNO members. But they were not just selling votes—they were selling out the nation, their dignity and their heritage. People were joining UMNO because they knew there was money to be made. The original purpose and vision of UMNO seemed to have been forgotten, cast by the wayside.

UMNO has done a lot of things for Malaysia, and in particular the Malays. It is a Malay party, and as such it defeated the Malayan Union and was instrumental in winning the independence of Malaya from Britain. Subsequently Malaysia managed much better than many other former colonies which became independent around the same time. We were able to grow, develop and progress with relatively little civil strife. There were the race riots of May 1969, but the important thing is that Malaysians settled that problem by themselves, without having to seek aid or intervention from anyone. Tun Razak—Najib's father—who was UMNO President and Prime Minister at that time, was able to reconcile even with the parliamentary Opposition to form a unity government for the purpose of healing the country.

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In the early days, UMNO was an open party run by very capable people. Yes, it has always been a Malay party and it has had its own extreme factions from time to time, but as an institution and a leading component of the Barisan Nasional, UMNO has always championed a policy of active cooperation and collaboration with non-Malays. Through this system of consensus-building and mutual respect, we turned a primarily agrarian nation that was quite poor into a dynamic modern economy that grew eventually to become the 17th-largest export trading nation in the world. Certainly, not everyone will accept this view of things, and there are those who will remain bitterly opposed to UMNO to the very end, but this has always been my understanding of UMNO and its place within the Barisan Nasional—it was first among equals, yes, but it was also an example of openness, honesty and integrity, providing opportunities for everyone to prosper.

But something changed along the way. After I stepped down, UMNO leaders began prioritising their own interests, or their families' interests, above everyone else's. Cash became king, and this king could apparently command the waves to halt. Now we have personality cults—politicians happily flaunting vast amounts of wealth and being accompanied by entourages more befitting of Ottoman despots than Ministers in a modern democracy. What happened?

Malaysia was becoming rich, and people could see that if you became a Minister, you stood to make quite a lot of money. People began to think about outright bribery—if you could buy support with cash, you could become a member of the Supreme Council, a Member of Parliament, a Deputy Minister, Minister, or even Prime Minister. This applied even to the smallest unit of the party—the branch. Members wanted to be elected branch chairmen because they stood to gain from division leaders who needed their support, and they learnt to ask for money, plush contracts which they could sell to someone else, and so forth. And as the country prospered, more and more UMNO members started to think: “What’s in it for me?” Soon, no one was talking about the original struggles of the party—education, poverty, uplifting the socio-economic condition of the Malays, all of which were still valid concerns after more than 50 years of UMNO-led government.

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Corruption is a cancer that rots your party from the inside out and deprives you of the very political power you seek. This is why I have always bitterly opposed corruption. Some people accuse me of being corrupt, but they produce no evidence of my corruption or of my seeking wealth and contracts for myself or my children. My children have made their own way through life (both upwards and downwards) without my help. I was very conscious that one day I would have to retire and it is much better to lead a life that is beyond reproach, especially when you are Prime Minister, to ensure that you will have a peaceful and comfortable retirement after your time has passed.

There has been no peace and comfort—especially not since the Prime Minister himself could use the phrase “cash is king” and seriously believe it. According to Najib, if you had a lot of money, you could buy support but the sums involved would presumably have been enormous. You would have had to give away millions. So where did Najib and his ilk get their money? First, they used government money, such as overpriced contracts

and the like. Then they borrowed huge sums—I will write about what I knew of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad scandal in the next chapter. They borrowed billions and stole a part, then left the Government—that is to say, the public—to foot the bill if anything went wrong. Obviously, the quality of politicians in UMNO and elsewhere has deteriorated a great deal because of corruption, which is now endemic throughout the political system.

Today, not many people know about the origins of UMNO. To be fair, not many who do know that story are still alive. I was there at the beginning, at the very first Congress that was held at the Sultan Sulaiman Club in Kuala Lumpur. I was not a participant but an observer. And since then, I have been a part of UMNO's fate, and its fate has been a part of mine, all the way through the 20th century and into the 21st until I resigned my membership in Tun Abdullah's time. I know more about UMNO than most people do because I went through it myself—I was a member and a leader. I saw the good that the party achieved and endured the challenges it faced. So, it was a terrible thing—a horrible disappointment to me personally—to see UMNO so engulfed and afflicted by the disease of corruption at the hands of crooks who were there only for their own selfish needs. UMNO deserved better than this.

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These were my private feelings at the time, and I needed to make an effort to articulate them publicly at least one more time. I decided to make another stand at the end of 2014. I could not attend the annual UMNO General Assembly in November that year owing to poor health. Some observers said that my absence was a snub—after all, I had skipped three general assemblies under Tun Abdullah and had not missed a single one after Najib became UMNO President and Prime Minister. But the reality was that I really was unwell. I was almost 90 at the time, and at that age even the slightest cough could be a cause for alarm. In fact, I had to cancel several appointments in the week leading up to the event, but even so, I felt that as one of the elders of UMNO it was my responsibility to explain my views about the weaknesses of the party on my blog. After all, everyone knew by then that UMNO was unpopular. Some were even saying that the party was no longer relevant.



What were the mistakes made by UMNO leaders and members? The first was to consider UMNO as a springboard for self-enrichment. UMNO was only accepting new members who were not perceived to be a threat to

the position of existing leaders. This was true at all levels. Local branches would not accept any person who was deemed capable of challenging the head of the branch. As a result, only poorly qualified or poorly talented Malays were accepted, and when the local leader retired, his successor would be weaker and less capable. The result was a lack of quality leadership throughout the branch and division levels. This explained why the party was unable to give a clear answer as to who would be the Menteri Besar of Selangor if the Barisan Nasional won the state election. Selangor was packed with talented and well-to-do Malays who did not need to use UMNO to enrich themselves—but most were unable to join the party, and those who did found themselves blocked if they aspired to leadership roles. UMNO had developed a “warlord” culture, with each petty leader saying “this is mine” or even “UMNO is mine”.

The second major weakness was the lack of internal criticism, as I mentioned earlier. Previous Prime Ministers—Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Onn—were leaders who were not only criticised but also challenged. I, too, was challenged and almost lost the party leadership in 1987, but under Najib I was advised not to criticise the Government publicly. At first, I followed this advice and made my criticisms in private, particularly regarding UMNO and issues affecting Bumiputera. But it did not work.

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My hope for the 2014 General Assembly was that UMNO delegates would take the opportunity to criticise party leaders openly, and that the leaders would take the views expressed by party delegates seriously. The delegates might not have been as clever as the foreign consultants the Government liked to employ at the time, but I believed they were not stupid either. Unfortunately, the sort of criticism and response I was hoping for did not materialise.

Something rotten

In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, a palace guard named Marcellus makes the famous remark that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” Shakespeare’s play is a tragedy that begins with palace intrigue, and the line by Marcellus is now often quoted to refer to corruption or some other situation that is terribly wrong in an institution, organisation or even country. Up until this time, I had been making my observations and criticisms known—but

they were from my perspective alone and based on my experience as a politician. I was now becoming increasingly aware of complaints being made by Malaysians about Malaysia. It was clear to me that others, too, thought that there was something rotten in the state of Malaysia. In February 2015, I listed several of these complaints on my blog, hoping that people could decide for themselves whether things really were as bad as they seemed. The following paragraphs summarise the kind of things I was hearing. These involved issues close to my heart, especially economic development and progress, but there were other issues as well.

Some businessmen were telling me that the Government was unwilling to pay them for work done. There always seemed to be disputes about whether the Government owed them anything at all. If the court decided that the Government had to pay, then there would be another dispute with regard to the amount. There would also be other delays, some of them lasting for years, and for many businesses, such delays could be fatal. Then there were those companies whose contracts had been withdrawn for unknown reasons. These contracts were often given to other people even after the original contract documents had been signed and sealed. Yet others complained that their project submissions had been revealed to others, presumably so that these competitors could make almost identical submissions. Frequently, the first bidder failed or had to raise his bid because others had quoted higher prices or lower prices as the case may be.

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Then there were delays in obtaining the necessary approvals, often for frivolous reasons—and sometimes, to speed up approval it became necessary to offer financial gratification. The party that paid never complained or made a report. This was a terribly unhealthy situation but the business people involved knew they might need the services of the corrupt officials in the future and they did not want to be blacklisted.

Other situations involved officials giving notice of immediate termination of permits long before the permits were actually due for termination. Sometimes, it seemed as if the authorities wanted to take over these businesses for themselves. The aggrieved parties could appeal, of course, but they would lose in the end. Sometimes an appeal was ignored, or the officials would say they were not free to meet. Or if a meeting did take place, the applicant would be told that the loss was his problem and therefore not the concern of the Government. Sometimes, permission

CAPTURING HOPE

The Struggle Continues for a New Malaysia



Capturing Hope follows chronologically the events described in Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad's best-selling book, *A Doctor in the House*. This standalone work chronicles not just the unexpected journey of Dr Mahathir back to the premiership but also the great changes taking place within Malaysia today.

The story starts with his retirement, which finally gave him the time and means to pursue matters close to his heart—the plight of the Palestinian people, and the criminalisation of war—before the country's troubles soon pulled him back into the maelstrom of Malaysian national politics.

Unable to sit idly by as his country plummeted towards disaster, Dr Mahathir found himself in the unique position of opposing the very party he led for 22 years. More astonishing was his victory in Malaysia's 14th General Election and his return at the age of 93 as the seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia, making him the oldest elected serving head of government in the world at the time.

This book offers a frank and at times blunt discussion of the difficulties that the Pakatan Harapan Government faced, the challenges of rebuilding national political consensus, the betrayals from within the coalition that ultimately led to the Government's downfall in March 2020 and to the many unthinkable firsts in Malaysian politics.

Whether one agrees with Dr Mahathir or not, it is impossible to deny the impact he has had—and continues to have—on the Malaysian political landscape. This book seeks to discuss those impacts as well as Dr Mahathir's unfinished struggle to steer Malaysia away from the destructive political dynamics that have fuelled corruption and division in the country for so long.

