



YEO BEE YIN

595

THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS

CLIMATE CHANGE • ENERGY • ENVIRONMENT • SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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YEO BEE YIN

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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The perspectives and thoughts acquired after being in Putrajaya were more complex and harder to capture than my views as a political novice back then. I have to thank my editorial team for inserting nuance where I was too straightforward - sometimes to my own detriment: my bluntness has been known to have irritated two Selangor Chief Ministers in memorable exchanges in the state assembly!

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Yeo Bee Yin

1 January 2022

PREFACE

Malaysian politics is an incredibly thorny and challenging environment. Entering politics is not a decision that anyone (especially the young) would take very lightly, given the immense personal cost that one must risk paying in fighting for a better Malaysia for all Malaysians. This was especially true for a young woman thinking about joining politics prior to 2018, who would worry about harsh crackdowns by the government and significant consequences to friends and family. However, this did not stop Yeo Bee Yin.

As a young and well-credentialed engineer in 2012, Bee Yin had the option of remaining in the private sector, away from the turbulent waters of politics. However, for 10 years now, she has tirelessly worked to bring Malaysia forward. In 2013, she was elected the Selangor State Legislative Assemblyperson for Damansara Utama. In 2018, she was elected by the people of Bakri as their Member of Parliament and then appointed as the Minister of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment & Climate Change (MESTECC).

Not many people know what a mammoth task it was to lead MESTECC. MESTECC was a ministry created after combining the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) with the Green Technology and Energy components from the Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water (KeTTHA), and the related components of Climate Change and Environment from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE). In short, Bee Yin took on the work that was previously meant for three separate ministries.

Under her leadership, we saw MESTECC launch the Malaysia Roadmap Towards Zero Single-Use Plastic by 2030, challenging international waste dumping in Malaysia, taking us forward on energy efficiency and renewable energy. Although her time as minister was short, her impact was undeniable.

I personally found it inspiring that Bee Yin capably held high public office while pregnant with her first child between 2019 and 2020. Every day in Malaysia, pregnant women carry out their work duties diligently and skillfully, but many face the unfounded stigma around pregnant women at the workplace as being ‘liabilities’. I dare say that many Malaysians found Bee Yin’s example inspirational.

Unfortunately, her time in MESTECC was cut short by the Sheraton Move in February 2020, a series of political machinations by the political elites that robbed the people of Malaysia of their duly elected government. Although Malaysia was thrown into political chaos, Bee Yin has continued her tireless efforts to ensure that Malaysia will be prepared to deal with the impending climate crisis by pushing for the growth of renewable energy in Malaysia and the introduction of a Climate Change Act.

This book will serve as a useful reminder of the “unfinished business” of preparing for the major energy and climate challenges of the future.

There is still so much work to be done. When asked to write this foreword, I reflected on all that we, as a nation, have gone through in the last two years. Betrayals of democracy, a global pandemic, an economic crisis, nationwide flooding, and so much more.

The struggle for a better Malaysia is difficult and can seem daunting to many, including myself. However, I draw hope from having a national asset like Yeo Bee Yin as a partner in this shared struggle to rebuild Malaysia and I am proud to call her a friend.

Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman

12 April 2022

INTRODUCTION

On 9 May 2018, for the first time in the nation's history, Malaysians witnessed a change of government. Barisan Nasional, a coalition that had been governing Malaysia for 61 years, was defeated by Pakatan Harapan, a coalition that consisted of the People Justice Party (PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP), National Trust Party (Amanah) and Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu). It was a triumphant day. Malaysians, especially those who voted for change, were overjoyed. Euphoria filled the air and hopes ran high for New Malaysia or “Malaysia Baharu”.

A few weeks later, I received a phone call from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed, the Prime Minister, while I was having breakfast in a noisy hawker centre, informing me that he would like to appoint me as a minister.

On 2 July 2018, at the age of 35, I was officially sworn in as a minister and had the privilege of leading the Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change (MESTECC) until the cabinet was dissolved on 24 February 2020, following Tun Mahathir's resignation as Prime Minister.

Twenty two months after winning the 14th General Election (GE14), the Pakatan Harapan Government lost its majority when Bersatu withdrew from Pakatan Harapan and 13 PKR Members of Parliament (MPs) led by Dato' Seri Azmin Ali switched allegiance. The political crisis that led to the fall of the Pakatan Harapan Government was dubbed the "Sheraton Move" as the back-door treachery plan first came to light on 23 February 2020 in Sheraton Hotel, Petaling Jaya. It ended with the formation of a new government named Perikatan Nasional under the premiership of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on 1 March 2020.

Throughout the 20 months as a minister, I was in turbo-charge mode and had little time for reflection. I was in a hurry to get things done, for reasons explained in the final chapter of the book. In fact, on the day that the unexpected Sheraton Move happened, I was in Pasir Gudang for a site visit that I did not want to delay until after my maternity leave. Despite being heavily pregnant (36 weeks plus), I wanted to finish up as much work as possible before delivering. Shortly after the Pakatan Harapan Government fell, I gave birth to my first child. At the same time, the country and the world entered into a long battle against Covid-19, which required many days of lockdown at home and hence, ample time for reflection. I thought it was the right time for me to start planning and writing my second book.

How did the idea of this book come about? It was actually a decision made during the launch of my first book, *Reimagining Malaysia*, on 14 March 2018. As we walked towards the venue of the book launch, I told my assistants that if we won GE14, I would write a sequel entitled *Rebuilding Malaysia* to document the journey of rebuilding the country.

Of course, I had assumed that I would be writing it through the lens of a legislator, just like my first book, *Reimagining Malaysia*, which covered broad policy areas that were close to my heart. It was beyond my wildest

imagination that I would be appointed a minister and would have the privilege of serving in the first non-Barisan Nasional cabinet in Malaysia.

Hence, instead of writing about broad policy interest areas, I decided to write it based on my experience as a MESTECC Minister and dive deep into the policies related to the four portfolios that I helmed - climate change, energy, environment, as well as science, technology and innovation.

As I finished the first draft of the book and was in the process of editing before sending to the editor, I realised that I had essentially written an analysis of the policies of the past, the changes we made and actions we took, and what future policies should look like. I decided that a more appropriate title for the book would be *The (Un)Finished Business*. While we had made considerable changes and impact in our short 20 months in office and had finished some “business”, there were many items on my to-do list that could not be completed due to the sudden change of government. I had also included in the book my ideas for improvement to areas that were, however, outside my purview even if I had stayed in office until the end of term. These are the areas of “unfinished business” for Malaysia.

Before I go further, let me clarify what this book is not trying to do. I am not writing this book to tell Malaysians what I would do if I were a minister again. No, this is not a book to pitch for a ministerial position. I am also not writing the book to garner more news coverage. No, it is also not intended to trigger sensational headlines. In fact, I kept accounts of controversial events as minimal as possible and if I did write them, I removed as many names as possible.

I hope that when this book is discussed in public, it will not be for the juicy stories that will hog headlines, but for the serious policy issues it addresses. Malaysia will have no future if politics and political discourse

are only about sensational news rather than substantial policies that will have a real impact on the world, the country and the lives of the people.

It is my hope that by writing down my ideas, perspectives and insights as a former minister, who was in the thick of action in these areas for 20 months, I will be able to contribute to current and future policy discourse and policy making. Furthermore, the public will be able to know more about the thought process in policy making and the journey in turning policies into action, beyond the day-to-day politicking and retail politics that occupy the newspapers and news portals. Most importantly, I hope that after reading the book, readers will have a deeper understanding, higher expectations, and specific demands in these areas of administration from the government and the policymakers.

Those close to me who knew I was writing a book, often asked what it was about, to which I would reply, “boring stuff”. Mostly because the four portfolios that I helmed were quite technical and the related policies can be very dry subjects. The editorial team and I tried very hard to make them as easy and interesting to read as possible, I hope we have succeeded at least partially.

We have arranged the book in Parts - Part I: Climate Change; Part II: Energy; Part III: Environment; Part IV: Science, Technology and Innovation, and Part V: A Decade in the Arena. Each Part is divided into Chapters, to enable readers to select the issue or discussion to read, or rather, skip to the topic of their choice. The Parts are written in such a way that each one can be extracted as a standalone account of the topic, hence we had also adjusted the editing style to suit this quirk.

In terms of house style, we tried to maintain a balance between informal or colloquial usage and the formal rules of spelling, capitalisation, scientific/technical terms, as well as names of people and institutions. People mentioned in the book are referred to by their full name at the

first appearance in every Part, and subsequently addressed in the way they are commonly referred to. For example, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed is referred to by his full name and honorifics in the first mention, and later on as “Tun Mahathir” in the rest of the Part.

Readers may notice that in the book, the terms “STI Minister”, “Environment Minister”, “Energy Minister” and “MESTECC Minister” are used interchangeably. Since MESTECC covered three different sectors: i. Energy, ii. Science and Technology, and iii. Environment and Climate Change, I chose the relevant ministerial capacity when discussing the different subjects.

For ease of reading, technical terms were written in full in the first instance and shortened as acronyms thereafter, e.g. “IPP” for Independent Power Producer. For Malaysian Government departments and agencies, we chose the short form most commonly used by the public, e.g. the Department of Environment is referred to as “DOE”, while the Ministry of Housing and Local Government is referred to by its Malay acronym, “KPKT.” The full names of the terms and government institutions are compiled in the glossary located at the back of the book for easy reference.

For readers who are interested in further research, the list of figures and tables are included after the Table of Contents. Where elaboration is required in specific instances, these are marked and explained in the footnotes at the bottom of the page. References or attributions have also been marked in the text and the sources are cited at the end of each Part.

The book is not entirely technical. In the final part of the book, I share some personal stories about the past decade of my political career. It is written from the perspective of a close observer and active participant in this historical period.

Writing this book was not an easy journey. In fact, I started writing it shortly after my first child was born but did not make much progress,

as I was distracted by having to learn and adjust to being a first-time mother. Writing a book requires long hours of undivided attention. I only began working seriously on the book in early January 2021 and shortly after that, I was pregnant again! In the meantime, the Covid-19 cases were soaring. The mental strain of being pregnant during the pandemic, caused by the constant fear of virus infection to the life in the womb, was unimaginable. Nevertheless, I did not want to procrastinate on the book any further.

As I continued writing, I realised that in order to discuss the topics comprehensively, the manuscript would be much longer than I had anticipated when I set out on the journey. Hundreds of painstaking hours were spent putting together the facts and experiences in the book, while undergoing pregnancy hormonal cycles and mental stress from the pandemic, spending late nights taking care of my one-year-old toddler, as well as tending to constituency and parliamentary work as an MP.

I am glad the book is finally completed. It is my sincere desire that this book will contribute to nation building even beyond my time in politics. I hope it can be a blessing to you and our beloved *tanahair* – Malaysia.

Yeo Bee Yin
1 January 2022

PART I

CLIMATE CHANGE



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YATASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

“I draw hope from having a national asset like Yeo Bee Yin as a partner in this shared struggle to rebuild Malaysia and I am proud to call her a friend.”

— Syed Saddiq —

THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS

From 2 July 2018 until 24 February 2020, I had the privilege of serving in the first non-Barisan Nasional Cabinet, leading the Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change (MESTECC).

While we made considerable changes during the 20 months in office and had finished some “business”, there were many items on my to-do list that could not be completed due to the sudden change of government. “The (Un)Finished Business” dives deep into the policy aspects of what was done and what was not completed in the four portfolios that I helmed - climate change, energy, environment, as well as science, technology and innovation. It ends with a personal reflection on my 10-year journey in politics.

I hope that through the book, you will be able to know more about the thought process in policy formulation and the journey of turning policies into actions, beyond the day-to-day politicking and retail politics that occupy the newspapers and news portals.

Yes, this is a “boring” book that discusses policies and unashamedly so, as our political discourse must not only revolve around sensational issues but also serious discussions into policies that will have a real impact on the world, the country and the lives of the people.

Yeo Bee Yin

YEO BEE YIN is the Member of Parliament for Bakri and former Minister of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change, Malaysia. She was named as one of Nature’s Ten People Who Mattered Most in 2018 and was selected by the World Economic Forum for its 2019 cohort of Young Global Leaders.

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