

BOOK REVIEW

CAPTURING HOPE: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES FOR A NEW MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Mahathir Mohamad writes about the political comeback of Malaysia's longest-serving leader during its most turbulent time in *Capturing Hope: The Struggle Continues for a New Malaysia* from 2018 to 2020. The book documents Mahathir's reflections as Malaysia's seventh Prime Minister after spearheading Pakatan Harapan (PH) to victory in the 14th General Election, which ended six decades of Barisan Nasional's dominance. The text combines Mahathir's life story with political analysis through his dual role as a memoirist and political commentator. The text combines Mahathir's story of his 92-year-old political comeback with his analysis of corruption and governance, coalition politics, and reform. Central to the account is the fragile nature of PH's multiracial coalition, Mahathir's uneasy reconciliation with Anwar Ibrahim, and the eventual collapse of the government following his resignation in 2020. The book shows that Mahathir believed that strong leadership was needed to achieve reform and stability, but his approach was often seen as authoritarian. Mahathir presents himself as both a reformist and a pragmatist who wants to create a Malaysia without corruption, ethnic divisions, and institutional weaknesses. Through its blend of inspiration and controversy, *Capturing Hope* offers valuable insights into the complexities of Malaysia's democratic transition and leadership challenges.

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REVIEW

The book, Mahathir Mohamad's *Capturing Hope: The Struggle Continues for a New Malaysia*, serves as both an autobiography and a political analysis of Malaysia's most challenging political era. After guiding the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition to a historic win in the 14th General Election (GE14) in 2018, Mahathir returned to politics and served as Prime Minister of Malaysia for a second term, as detailed in the book. The historic victory brought an end to sixty years of Barisan Nasional (BN) leadership, while Mahathir's return to power at 92 years old remained a singular event. The autobiography functions as both a political analysis and a personal narrative about the struggle for reform, sound government, and national unity in the presence of major challenges. The title *Capturing Hope* demonstrates Mahathir's conviction that Malaysia will improve despite its prolonged issues with corruption and ineffective government and ethnic tensions. The book provides readers with vital information about Mahathir's political views and the complex connections between political alliances and government operations in Malaysia. The text presents itself with both clarity and understanding.

It was a shocking and unexpected turn when Mahathir returned to the political arena. Few could have imagined his comeback 15 years after he resigned in 2003. The political situation in Malaysia during 2018 was marked by scandal and controversy, particularly the corruption scandal involving 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), where then Prime Minister Najib Razak was implicated. The deep worry Mahathir had about the state of the nation led him to join the opposition alliance while leading the fight against Najib. One of the main reasons for his comeback to power was his belief that Najib's government was corrupt and detrimental to Malaysia's future. Mahathir describes how the 1MDB crisis damaged Malaysia's standing internationally and expresses his unhappiness with the nature of Malaysian politics at the time. Mahathir became actively involved in the Pakatan Harapan alliance due to this scandal. His eventual triumph in the 2018 election, which saw Najib lose, was a victory for Malaysia's democratic values and the rule of law. The election served as a turning point, which brought hope for better governance and political change.

Mahathir describes the early years of his second term as prime minister in *Capturing Hope*, emphasising the difficulties of leading a coalition encompassing various political objectives and philosophies. The coalition achieved victory in the 2018 election, which unified the group, yet leading the group proved to be extremely difficult for me. His story demonstrates the nature of coalition politics, which requires politicians to manage opposing interests while creating intricate political deals to maintain unity. Mahathir's handling of the difficulties in Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multireligious society is one of the book's central themes. The People's Justice Party (PKR), together with the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the National Trust Party (Amanah), and Mahathir's new Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu), formed the wide political coalition known as Pakatan Harapan. The parties have different ideological priorities, which include social justice and ethnic equality as well as economic reform and anti-corruption initiatives.

The challenges Mahathir had in maintaining this coalition are depicted in the book. He needed to promote his program of change and good government while handling the needs of various ethnic groups. Mahathir admits that managing the expectations of the Malaysian people, who had high aspirations for immediate and significant transformation, while ensuring that all coalition parties felt their opinions were heard, was one of his biggest challenges during his second term. The story includes Mahathir's connection with Anwar Ibrahim, who leads PKR and serves as a vital member of the coalition. The promise of a change of power from Mahathir to Anwar was a point of contention within the alliance. During his previous term, Anwar served as Mahathir's deputy. However, in the 1990s, he was imprisoned in a highly publicised political scandal. The formation of Pakatan Harapan relied heavily on their reconciliation, but their

intricate political and personal backgrounds still shaped the coalition's internal dynamics. Mahathir discusses this relationship in *Capturing Hope* by revealing the dangerous power relationships and fundamental disagreements that resulted in the Pakatan Harapan government's collapse in 2020.

The most powerful part of Mahathir's memoirs is the collapse of the Pakatan Harapan administration. The government coalition collapsed after Mahathir stepped down as prime minister in February 2020, which led to Muhyiddin Yassin's Perikatan Nasional (PN) taking control of power. Mahathir expresses his disappointment and disenchantment with some of the leaders in his party while describing the internal party conflicts and political scheming that resulted in this precipitous collapse. His short second term came to an end when he left office, and Malaysia began a new period of political instability. The difficulties of coalition rule are brought to light by Mahathir's thoughts on the circumstances surrounding his resignation. Despite winning the election, the Pakatan Harapan government could not maintain the unity required for efficient governance within the party. Political disarray brought about by the conflict between Mahathir's party, Bersatu, and the other coalition members made it possible for Muhyiddin Yassin to form a new government with the backing of the Islamist party PAS and former BN members (Muhamad Helmy et al., 2021). Mahathir acknowledges that his departure ultimately caused the government he had helped create to fall, but he frames it as a difficult but necessary move.

As the book's title suggests, Mahathir is optimistic about Malaysia's future despite the political unrest surrounding the fall of Pakatan Harapan. The author presents his future-oriented vision through his emphasis on economic policy transformation and educational and governance system evolution in the later chapters. Mahathir identifies corruption as Malaysia's major issue, which needs to be removed to ensure the country's ongoing development. Mahathir emphasizes the need to construct an inclusive and equitable Malaysia that accepts all citizens regardless of race or religion. He emphasizes the requirement for policies that prioritize the entire nation's requirements above the racial politics that have controlled Malaysian governance and advocates for a continuous focus on national unity and identity. He believes Malaysia can overcome its ethnic barriers and strive towards a shared future of stability and prosperity. Mahathir examines Malaysia's economic prospects while advocating for laws that support sustainable development, innovation, and educational transformation. He emphasizes that Malaysia should concentrate on developing its human capital and advancing technology to adapt to the changing global economic environment. Mahathir presents a bold and forward-thinking vision, yet he recognizes that achieving these goals requires resolving significant social and political challenges.

Mahathir considers his leadership style, which his detractors have frequently called authoritarian, throughout *Capturing Hope*. He argues that strong leadership was required to enact challenging reforms, and he supports many of his choices during his two terms as prime minister. Although Mahathir freely admits that his management style has generated controversy, he maintains that many of his choices, especially those pertaining to governance change and economic development, were in the country's best interests (Wain, 2009). His leadership views offer an essential understanding of Malaysian governance in general. A persistent problem exists in finding an equilibrium between powerful leadership and democratic governance. Mahathir maintained that a more centralized and regulated type of governance was required to steer Malaysia through its periods of rapid economic expansion and modernisation (Bunnell, 2004; Khairul Azman et al., 2021). Mahathir is unreserved in his conviction that his leadership contributed to Malaysia becoming one of Southeast Asia's most developed countries, albeit acknowledging that this strategy has its detractors (Reza & Yasmin, 2019). Mahathir also shares his opinions about Malaysia's place in the world. He takes issue with Western meddling in developing countries' politics, especially with the US's Middle East

policies. The book frequently returns to Mahathir's long-standing criticism of American foreign policy and advocacy for greater unity among Muslim countries. The country needs to maintain its independence in international relations while taking an active role in promoting peace and security, according to him.

The book *Capturing Hope* offers political scientists multiple resources to study coalition politics and multi-ethnic governance and leadership challenges in rapidly transforming political environments. Mahathir's description of his second term offers important insights about coalition government operations through his explanation of the challenges that come with uniting political interests and beliefs. The book provides vital research information about democratic transition barriers and leadership negotiation processes for Southeast Asian political science scholars. Nevertheless, there are several issues with the book. Even though Mahathir thoroughly explains the political developments that influenced his second term, there are times when his story comes across as defensive. He minimises the long-term effects of some of his more contentious measures and is eager to justify his leadership choices. The book's critics under Mahathir's leadership could state that the book does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the effects of his previous term, particularly on issues such as democratic governance and human rights.

The book does not address Malaysia's broader socioeconomic issues effectively. Mahathir talks about governance and corruption, but he doesn't go into great detail on other essential topics like wealth disparity, environmental sustainability, and the future of Malaysia's educational system. The major problems will affect Malaysia's future, and a more detailed analysis would have provided a more comprehensive view of the country's problems. This book is an incisive and captivating autobiography and a rare glimpse into one of Malaysia's most important political personalities. Through his analysis of his second prime ministership, coalition politics, and national prospects, Mahathir provides readers with a deep understanding of Malaysian political and governmental complexities. The book delivers political scientists valuable information about government structures and leadership dynamics, and political system development through reform processes. The book provides substantial insights into Malaysian leadership and governance, although it lacks a detailed self-assessment. The book demonstrates Mahathir's total dedication to reform and his optimistic vision for a better Malaysia, which makes it essential reading for students of Malaysian politics and Southeast Asian political leadership.

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