

04/07/1999

Shahnon apologises to Dr M over novel's contents

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ALOR STAR, Sat. - National laureate Datuk Shahnon Ahmad has admitted that the manner in which he criticised Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the novel *Shit* was harsh, and has apologised if the Prime Minister was offended or insulted by the contents.

Shahnon told a gathering last night that he did not mean to insult the Prime Minister.

"Jika Dr Mahathir tersinggung atau terhina, saya minta maaf tetapi saya langsung tidak berniat menghina dan mengutuknya. Saya juga tidak pernah menghina ibu Dr Mahathir."

("If Dr Mahathir is offended or insulted, then I apologise but I did not in any way mean to insult or deride him. I have also never insulted Dr Mahathir's mother.")

The Prime Minister had repeatedly said he was offended by Shahnon's book. At the Umno general assembly last month, the Umno president said Shahnon had not only hurled insults at him but also his mother.

He also failed to understand why Shahnon had so much anger and hatred towards him when he never criticised, what more insulted the latter.

Dr Mahathir also said that for the Malays, insulting one's parents was most forbidden.

Shahnon said he got the idea to write the novel after meeting former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. He said at the meeting, Anwar had asked him to write something and after thinking about the matter for some time, he started on the novel.

He said national laureate A. Samad Said was among several writers present at the meeting at Anwar's residence after he was sacked.

Shahnon said his conversation with Anwar also touched on allegations of sexual misconduct against him (Anwar). He said Anwar responded by asking him to "write something".

"I went home and gave it a thought and this is the product," he added.

Shahnon, who is a life member of Pas, received full backing from Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor and head of its consultative council Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

The latter had stated that the Quran allows the use of profanities and that Allah swears.

Nik Aziz had said on April 27 that the novel, which contained profanities, was not against the religion.

He said Islam did not bar Muslims from uttering profanities or to insult a person if they were used at the right place and time. Nik Aziz said this was part of human nature.

Shahnon told some 200 Pas supporters that he wrote in such a manner in order to criticise the leadership of Dr Mahathir and the Government.

"Dr Mahathir has ignored criticisms by the opposition in running the country.

"Thus, as a writer I believe I can point out the mistakes and criticise him (the Prime Minister) in the form of a novel, although it was done in a manner which was rather harsh," Shahnon said.

Last week, he announced that he would be working on another political satire which would be more stinging than *Shit*. He said without profanities, the book would be meaningless.

Asked to comment on Shahnon's apology, Nik Aziz said he did not want to interfere as it involved other people's affairs. He acknowledged that to

date he had not read the book.

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