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Drama unfolding in Sik that may have bearing on national politics

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A SMALL time drama is unfurling within Pas which may, within a short period of time, have a bearing on national politics.

It is about the intention of national literary laureate Datuk Shanon Ahmad, Pas MP for Sik, who wants to resign because he has been sick lately.

Shanon's reason behind his intention to resign as an MP is because being unwell will not allow him to perform his tasks to represent the electorate.

It is a known fact that he had not been too well of late but no one can really tell for sure how bad his condition is other than Shanon himself.

The fact that he is insisting that he is truly sick and not prepared to continue to serve Sik should help one to conclude that he wants out.

However, at the same time, Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor seemed suspicious of the Bernama report which was splashed in most newspapers of Shanon's intention to resign.

To him, the report was probably not true and he believed that Shanon was still capable of carrying out his tasks as an MP.

There might have been a communication breakdown or Shanon, on his part, known for having a mind of his own, could have chosen to ignore the protocol of party politics - that he has to inform the top party leaders first before talking to the Press. But that is internal Pas affairs and the party leadership will have to trash it out with Shanon.

More of interest in terms of national politics, if Shanon remains adamant about quitting and Pas leaders accept his decision, the country can expect to be served with an interesting political drama.

A by-election for the Sik parliamentary seat can be expected to see sparks all over the place and probably can be dubbed the election of the new millennium for Malaysia.

Shanon won the seat in the last general election by a very close margin, securing 13,504 votes against Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paduka Dr Abdul Hamid Othman's 13,026.

That gave Shanon a meagre 478-vote victory, not a comfortable one where one is prepared to bet his last dollar on the outcome for the seat in the event of a by-election.

To Pas, the victory, though close, reflects the preference of the people of Kedah.

While not attempting to take anything away from Pas, the party must accept that Shanon, no matter how people choose to perceive him, is no small name.

Apart from being a famed literary figure, he is also one shrouded in controversy especially in his sojourns in the past decade.

In the early 1990s, he chose to be part of the controversial Al Arqam movement which is now banned.

Shanon's departure from the movement was equally dramatic, in which he wrote a book denouncing the movement because of its practice and the deviant nature of its leader Ashaari Muhammad.

Of late, prior to the general assembly, he became embroiled in another controversy when he wrote Shit, a book full of vulgarity and aimed at criticising Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

It was amid the publicity surrounding the book that Shanon entered the general election fray under the Pas ticket, a party in which he is a life

member.

Against this backdrop, Shanon won the seat, staging one of the major upsets of the last general election against Umno's Hamid, a moderate Islamist.

The question now is whether Pas can find another person like Shanon if he chooses to follow through with his intention to quit.

It is highly unlikely and the seat if vacated would be filled via a by-election electorate. It can be truly demoralising for Pas if it were to lose it.

One must not forget that Sik is a seat in Kedah where Pas made major inroads and to lose the seat may see Pas taking numerous steps backwards in convincing the nation that the State is ripe for its picking come the next general election.

A by-election there will be the first contest for a Pas-controlled seat since the last general election as the other two by-elections - Sanggang and Teluk Kemang - were both Barisan Nasional seats.

Furthermore, Sik is a true-blue Malay constituency in which securing a sizable vote from the community ensures the party certain victory. This is unlike Teluk Kemang and to a certain degree Sanggang, where the non-Malay vote helped to determine the outcome.

As such, a by-election in Sik can very well be read as a litmus test on whether the voting trend among Malays has changed since last year.

At the same time, a by-election at this stage seems quite remote as the Pas leadership from Fadzil to its youth chief Mahfuz Omar look to be against the idea of Shanon resigning.

Both Fadzil and Mahfuz are more supportive of the idea that Shanon take a break without having to resign.

Their contention is that the party can provide representatives to undertake Shanon's responsibilities in the constituency.

That may be the most probable outcome of the whole drama, unless Shanon is prepared to stick to his intention and insist that the party respect his decision.

And that again is not far-fetched as Shanon had proven to be a man with his own mind when he decided to abandon the Al Arqam.

While these uncertainties may last until Shanon or the Pas leaders can come to a concrete decision, Umno can be expected to start eyeing the seat.

On their part, it is also a predicament as Hamid, its potential candidate, is also caught in a bind.

After his defeat in the last general election, he was made a Senator to allow him to assume his former ministerial post.

If he is chosen to contest for the seat, he will have to resign from his senatorship.

If he wins, that ends the problem but if he loses, then the situation becomes awkward for him.

But this will be the least of Umno's worries. Most important for Umno will be to win the seat and throw a spanner in Pas' confidence of gaining ground in Kedah.

In the meantime, the nation awaits patiently for the next chapter in the drama of the Sik MP.

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