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Poser over Umno-Pas debate

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TO debate or not to debate. That is the question. Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said "yes". So did his Pas counterpart, Mahfuz Omar.

But the chief of the Pas ulama council, Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, said "no", as did some Umno Menteris Besar.

It seems that even before the debate takes place - if it ever does - there will be a preliminary debate among proponents and opponents of the event.

In the grey world of partisan politics, the two sides can even come to the same conclusion. Nik Aziz, now famous for his shooting-from-the-hip "political fatwa", said the debate would not accomplish anything.

The Kelantan Menteri Besar concluded that the two debaters "are lower-rung leaders who cannot make decisions".

Sharing this sentiment is Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob. He advised Umno Youth to call off the debate, saying it would be a waste of time. What vision and foresight!

It may be true, as Nik Aziz says, that the Pas Youth chief is a lower-rung leader. But in the Umno hierarchy, the Youth chief is an important position. In the case of Hishammuddin, he is also a Cabinet member.

Nik Aziz's assertion that the debate should be between the presidents of Umno (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) and Pas (Datuk Fadzil Noor) "as all decisions are made by them" may be true only with Pas.

In Umno, Dr Mahathir has to contend with many demands and points of view when making decisions. He was even challenged for the leadership of the party.

While the Tok Guru (Nik Aziz) is against the debate, the Tuan Guru - Terengganu Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang - is for it.

But Nik Aziz, being Nik Aziz, cannot but shoot his mouth off as some politicians are apt to do. I have been saying for years that Nik Aziz is first and foremost a politician. A street fighter at that.

An ulama and Tok Guru would not so easily blame social ills on women, whether they wear the tudung or not, as he recently did. One's piousness and fear of God does not depend on the size of one's serban (turbun) or the length of one's tudung.

He had, in fact, made a statement contrary to Islam. The religion places the burden of protecting women on men. The Quran says: "Men are appointed guardians over women, because of that in respect of which Allah has made some of them excel (over) others, and because men spend their wealth."

It would appear that Nik Aziz and others who oppose the debate were motivated by fear that its outcome may not be favourable to their interests.

The final decision should be left to the respective movements. They should be given the right to decide if they want to proceed with it or to call it off. As for Umno Youth, it has the tacit approval of party president Dr Mahathir to proceed with the plan.