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Pas may adopt aggressive outlook under Hadi

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IT was a weekend many Malaysians will not forget for a long time.

On Saturday, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stunned the nation when he announced his resignation at the party's 56th general assembly.

While the Prime Minister is said to have agreed to withdraw his resignation, uncertainty will prevail unless and until he returns to office.

Yesterday morning, Datuk Fadzil Noor died after two weeks without regaining consciousness in the hospital. He had undergone a coronary bypass.

While uncertainties remain in Umno, it is not so in Pas. Abdul Hadi Awang, the deputy president, will now be the acting president until the party elections next year. It is a natural path for any political party to take. The only question that lingers is, how will Hadi shape Pas?

Hadi and Fadzil were both products of the renowned Islamic University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt. Together with Nakhaie Ahmad, who is now in Umno, the trio were considered the Young Turks when they started making their presence felt in Pas in the early 1980s.

Their battle then was to oust the Old Guard led by then president Asri Muda, who was demonised as a Malay nationalist more than an Islamist and was alleged to have strayed from the true teachings of Islam.

In turn, Asri described the Young Turks as radicals and Iran-influenced.

But Asri failed to stop the Young Turks and in 1982, he was out of office. Conservative Yusof Rawa took over and was considered a figurehead for the Young Turks to spread their influence further.

In 1989, the transformation of Pas was completed when Fadzil took over the presidency with Hadi as his deputy.

It was a compromise when Hadi withdrew from contesting the presidency.

Even then, between Fadzil and Hadi, the latter was deemed more influential, or at least much in the limelight, with his fiery speeches and harsh decrees.

Hadi made his mark in national politics with his decrees which led to the mengkafir (describing Umno members as infidels), the separate congregations during prayers, separate burial grounds and refusing to eat animals slaughtered by Umno members.

All this marked Hadi as a radical, more so than Fadzil who was more soft-spoken and not as keen to issue decrees.

Dr Alias Mohamed in his book, Pas' Platform, Development and Change 1951-1986, wrote that Hadi was more than a politician. "He is a Tok Guru, a religious supremo who, in the early 1980s, was much revered by the party's militant groups.

"Admittedly, a great number of Umno members too admired Haji Hadi privately. His oratory skill, his strong and persistent voice, knowledge of Islam and the sense of confidence he was able to exude in his lectures and sermons seemed to point to the fact that he was the new messiah in the lexicon of Pas politics."

When Hadi started his political moves, he praised the Islamic revolution ala-Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini was an icon of his.

This is the backdrop which has created perceptions of Pas turning more aggressive and radical under Hadi.

Harakah editor Zulkifli Sulong, who is close to Hadi, disagrees that the

new Pas leader will institute drastic change for the party and depart from what Fadzil had laid out.

"Those who are close to Hadi will tell you that he works on consensus and does not impose his views and stand on the party."

What Zulkifli says may be quite true, especially today when Hadi is no longer a mere political leader trying to whip up sentiments and emotions.

Hadi does seem to have mellowed, especially after becoming the Menteri Besar of Terengganu, requiring him to see things from the other side of the coin.

Yet, his hardline stand and flowing robe and turban conjure a different image from Fadzil, who was comfortable in the "decadent Western outfit" of suit and tie as well as in the traditional baju Melayu.

Delving beneath Hadi's outward appearance, his thoughts, though less provocative than in his early days, have not shown an ability to compromise or reconcile with Malaysia's multi-cultural and multi-religious realities.

The Pas Terengganu Government's policies on gender segregation, on implementing its hudud and other laws deemed Islamic, have neither changed nor diluted.

If Hadi truly remains a hardliner, Malay and national politics will definitely take a different turn yet again.

Umno may face a much more aggressive Pas, especially in terms of Islamic one-up-manship.

In terms of national politics, however, the Barisan Nasional may find Hadi a blessing in disguise, for non-Muslims tend to be more paranoid of Pas under Hadi than Fadzil.

But Hadi cannot be underestimated as he has repeatedly proven that beneath the cloak of his Islamic/Arab outlook is a man with much political cunning. Pas seems to be in good hands.

On that note, may Fadzil rest in peace.

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