

## **Dr M and Pandikar enact a drama**

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COMMENT Is there something at work in the speculative gap between Dr Mahathir Mohamad's intimations that Dewan Rakyat speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia has resigned and the latter's swift disavowal of intent to quit?

The offhand manner in which Mahathir revealed to people who turned up in Ipoh on Sunday for a public forum organised by Umno Gopeng division that Pandikar had resigned was certain to stir a swarm of speculation.

Mahathir did not elaborate, a sure sign that when he lets drop a succulent teaser he's up to something deeper than his cavalier manner would suggest.

Was Mahathir floating a trial balloon which the speaker was quick to shoot down - all as part of a script aimed at forging a larger purpose?

We know that nothing happens spontaneously as far as Mahathir is concerned and we have deputy speaker Ronald Kiandee's word that Pandikar (photo) had indeed vented disgruntlement at the way things were going in the Lower House.

Therefore a meeting between the two - one, an extirpator of sitting prime ministers, and the other, a vaguely unhappy arbiter of an arena which may want to take a confidence vote on the Najib Abdul Razak premiership - at this juncture in the national political landscape is not something untoward.

It's no longer speculation that the two met for a not inconsequential tete-a-tete because we have Pandikar's word for it when he said, in his statement disclaiming intent to resign, that "It was a meeting between leaders to discuss what is happening to the country."

It's odd that Pandikar should view himself as a 'leader' when his role as speaker makes him something rather different to what is commonly conceived to be a leader's.

He is more referee of a debating arena, a steer for the parliamentary traffic in ideas and motions, an arbiter of legislative proceedings, maybe even an adjudicator between competing debaters of national questions.

A leader conjures up the image of somebody running in front of a pack which follows him/her (although one should not tell that to Najib, a man who believes in following, not leading, the pack) whereas a parliamentary speaker has to stay to the side and in a discreet yet no-nonsense manner, exert his authority.

But it's not just Pandikar who possibly misconstrues his role to be that of a leader's.

PM Najib also did so when he mentioned Pandikar, among others from Sabah such as Chief Minister Musa Aman, federal minister Rahman Dahlan and Sabah speaker Salleh Said, as leaders who he is satisfied with presumably because of their solidity.

Translation: all the favourably mentioned leaders have not wavered in their allegiance to the PM in the face of Mahathir's campaign to oust Najib from office.

### **Politically partisan company**

But what is the speaker of the national parliament doing in politically partisan company?

Did Najib praise Pandikar because he wanted to cajole him into withdrawing his resignation because, as Mahathir revealed yesterday in response to Pandikar's disavowal late on Sunday, that the speaker had told him that he had already submitted his letter of resignation to the PM?

It sounds convoluted but Malaysian politics is indeed serpentine in complexity; the latest machinations should not surprise as twists and turns in ongoing developments make surprise the only constant in the unfolding drama.

There should be little doubt by now that Mahathir (photo) and Pandikar are actors in a play whose end as far as Mahathir is concerned is clear but whose objective for Pandikar is not quite obvious, save for the reality that he comes from a state whose leaders are notorious for being politicians of shifting allegiances.

When it is seen how Najib has virtually locked up Umno, the cabinet and the BN behind him in the battle to stave off Mahathir, Parliament remains the only arena he is not sure of bestriding as the winner he has to seem to be against an opponent who once he gets started is never satisfied with anything less than total victory.

The latest contretemps about the resignation or non-resignation of Parliament's point man are the opening moves of a drama of attempted removal and dogged resistance that must come to some denouement before a holy month begins in just under a month, a period when it's not-on to badmouth a fellow Muslim.

A drama that began in August last year when Mahathir publicly withdrew support for Najib is edging closer to a finale, with Pandikar Amin Mulia assaying a bit part that may be small in actual content but momentous in consequence.