

## **Pandikar's existential problem**

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COMMENT Parliament's speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia is a sorely conflicted person: he wants to be a fair speaker but is beholden to the ruling BN and that undercuts his aspirations as the Lower House's impartial arbiter.

In philosophical parlance, Pandikar has an existential problem, but it's not like Hamlet's ("To be or not to be").

The Shakespearean prince was a captive of indecision. Pandikar isn't a prisoner of irresolution - he comes down on the side of the powers-that-be.

His problem is that he cannot reconcile himself to the hopelessness of his aspiration to be a fair arbiter.

This trips him into oxymoronic situations. The latest, in its gaucheness, illustrates the point.

He has asked the opposition to show him a list of MPs who don't like Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak; only then will he decide on whether to allow a motion of no-confidence to be tabled for debate in the House.

<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/316578>

Pandikar figures that if he sees about a 100 names on the anti-Najib list, he can convince the government to acquiesce to a debate on the no-confidence motion.

Granted the media should not hold hard and fast to what a public figure says off-the-cuff, especially on critical issues in times of stress.

But the very words Pandikar uttered when tackled by the press in the lobby of Parliament yesterday clued us on to his captivity.

As quoted by this news portal, Pandikar's words inferred his predicament:

"I know they [opposition] just have 89 [...] but if they submit a list (and show that maybe) they have 100 with them, then maybe I can pressure the government to debate this."

There could be no more clearer testament to Pandikar's captivity to the ruling BN.

The criterion for motions such as the apparent mishandling of the 1MDB issue that the opposition wants debated is whether the matter is urgent and of public importance.

You have to be someone soldered to a flaperon from Flight MH370 and mired in the deeps

of the Indian Ocean to deny that 1MDB is a matter of paramount importance with an urgent claim to the attention of the highest tribunal in the country.

But Pandikar thinks he has to convince the ruling BN which appointed him before he can allow a motion of no-confidence to be debated.

As was noted earlier, the press cannot be too exacting about what is said extemporaneously by public figures in moments of intensity and public drama.

### **Stirring a drumfire**

But Pandikar's penchant for referrals to the government of the day was apparent last June when Dr Mahathir Mohamad, speaking at a public forum in Ipoh, said the speaker had informed the former premier that he had quit his post.

Inevitably, Mahathir's disclosure, coming as it did in the escalating cauldron of damaging revelations about 1MDB, stirred a drumfire.

In the furore, Pandikar, solicitous of the government's feelings, moved to hightail whatever it was he told Mahathir (photo) out of the blast area.

It followed that what he told Mahathir was not what the latter interpreted it to be.

In the ensuing recrimination, it transpired that Pandikar had made it known he was unhappy with what he perceived to be shortfalls to the powers and perquisites of office and was on the verge of wanting out.

Fast came placatory word from the PM's quarters that the shortfalls would be alleviated though it was not clear that a shoring up of his powers was on the cards.

As often happens in these situations, the mere intimation that alleviations, if not swift improvements, were on the way would be sufficient to tamp down the tempest.

If the entire episode was instructive, it was to convey that Pandikar was unhappy with the way things are with the speaker's role and perquisites.

He appeared to want his office to be exempt from any control by the minister in the PM's Department in charge of parliamentary affairs.

This was a reasonable requisite for the independence of his position as speaker.

But at the next sitting of Parliament shortly after the contretemps over Mahathir's revelation, Pandikar did not furnish evidence that he had gained the autonomy he clearly desires and wants so that he can stamp his mark as an impartial arbiter.

As with all who do not reckon with the core reason for their painful predicament, Pandikar

proceeds to want something - independence as an impartial arbiter - he cannot have and instead of reconciliatory acceptance of his situation, he veers into oxymoronic rather than clarifying narratives of his dilemma.

Hence he found himself saying "Show me the list" (of MPs who want a no confidence motion against Najib) without the faintest appreciation of its inherent irony.

Like the English rendition of a part of his name, Pandikar wants honour where, in his indebtedness to BN, he simply can't have it.

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