

Former judge Hishamudin Yunus ought to be speaker

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COMMENT | Aside from Rais Yatim, nobody seems to know who the other candidates are for the post of speaker of the 14th Parliament.

Speculation has swirled over this appointment, with media reports saying that Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad is in favour of Rais Yatim.

But apart from Rais, there has been no mention of other nominees for the post.

An unusual discretion reigns, an indication perhaps the post is not an object of contention among the four component parties of the ruling Pakatan Harapan coalition.

This is unlike the speculation that burbled over the identity of the candidates for the 13 ministerial posts announced a week ago today.

Before that announcement was made there was avid speculation of who would be on the list, evidenced by the floating on social media of different lists of nominees.

The apparent lack of jostling for the post of speaker aside, a decision on who is to be the one impends this week as the presidential council of Pakatan Harapan meets, today presumably, to make their choice.

The 14th Parliament, the first federal legislative session of what is being touted as the "Malaysia Baru" (New Malaysia) era, opens next week.

The identity of the speaker is critical to sustaining the good reformist vibes in the country inaugurated by Harapan's epochal victory at the polls on May 9.

A speaker who is a holdover from the ignominious recent past, as Rais would be in spite of his not inconsiderable merits for the position, would dampen those vibes.

Conversely, a speaker from among the ranks of the lonely few who were rejects of the Najib era would accentuate the "new broom-ism" coursing like adrenaline through the vein of this country.

It is important to sustain this mood because the forces of reaction are gathering to thwart the reformist agenda begun by Harapan's victory in GE14.

These forces cannot quite coalesce because of the magnitude of the moral squalor -- from ongoing revelations of its extents -- that had beset the Najib

administration.

The turpitude is far too extensive for even its most fervent partisans to rationalise.

The reactionaries are lying in wait though, for any opportunity to rebound -- to stall, and even reverse, the reformist agenda of Harapan.

They must be given short shrift at every turn: The speaker-ship of Parliament is a valuable opportunity to peg them in the leprous deeps where they apparently feel no shame.

Rais is a Johnny-come-lately to Bersatu who endeared himself to Mahathir with supportive comments about Harapan in the waning days of the GE14 campaign.

Seemingly, Mahathir wants to reward him for what was an eleventh-hour endorsement of the opposition's cause in the final prelude to GE14 when a groundswell for Harapan appeared to be forming.

It took no great courage for Rais to come out for Harapan at that point in time though in coming out for the opposition he had broken ranks with the forces ranged unabashedly in favour of the BN-led government headed by Najib Abdul Razak.

One recalls the grovelling support shown by corporate magnate Tony Fernandes for Najib at precisely the time when Rais was signalling his disgust with BN.

During the Najib imperium, Rais (photo) had been a cabinet-ranked adviser to the government on cultural affairs, one of the more plum contracts among the 17,000 that "Cash is king" supremo Najib doled out to prop up his regime.

There had long been elements of opportunism in the stances of Rais, to the extent that he -- under pressure from critics for his support at one time of repressive policies of the BN government -- dismissed his doctoral dissertation on the rule of law as an academic exercise, presumably done not from conviction but from expediency.

There was also the matter of imputed impropriety on Rais's part with regard to an Indonesian female citizen several years ago, publicity around which subsided as swiftly as it welled up.

Past speakers of our Parliament have not distinguished themselves because the position was treated as a reward for journeymen of the then ruling coalition BN.

For this job, the time has come to make a clean break with the past by naming someone who has a clean record for independence and impartiality.

Retired Court of Appeal judge Mohd Hishamudin Mohd Yunus, like Rais, hailing from Negeri Sembilan, but unlike his more famous Negeri Sembilan-ite, with not a speck in his slipstream, would make a better choice for speaker.

He was an outstanding High Court and CoA judge who was passed over for elevation to the Federal Court because of decisions that former PM Najib did not like.

He retired in September 2013 without the epaulettes that signify attainment of the highest honours of his calling.

His judgements upheld the constitutionally-mandated rights of individuals to freedom from the repressive intrusions of the state.

These opinions, based on textual originalism, displayed a stirring disregard for societal conventions compounded of religious dogma and executive overreach.

This qualifies him for recognition and reward in the New Malaysia.

He paid the price for his convictions under the ancien regime; he should be honoured under the new one by being appointed to a position that would be just desserts for his performance on the bench.

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