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Two who find it so hard to join party

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PUAN Nor and Fouad will miss out on Thursday's Umno assembly. Again, that is. For several years now they've been sitting out the annual assembly.

For the last five years, they made their way to the Putra World Trade Centre in the federal capital but only as spectators to one of the country's major events.

Others follow the proceedings too. But these two 30-somethings have been trying hard to become card-carrying members of the party since the early 1990s, but to no avail.

Puan Nor's father was a member in Kampung Baru while Fouad's uncle and other family members have been members for as long as he could remember.

Each year they would follow newspaper reports on developments that take place in the party.

They have some strong opinions on what's going on but found no way to express them except to their family members and close friends.

But Puan Nor has, of late, shown less interest in the party what with having to do daily battle with her growing-up children and managing a small business.

But Fouad has not lost interest. Apart from getting updates from family members and friends, he follows developments in the local Press closely.

He's also following developments via the party's Internet newspaper though he reckons they lack excitement.

Fouad also buys local magazines on politics and a few days ago showed me a new book written by a former minister.

I'm sure he'll let me know what he thinks of the book and the former minister in a few days time.

I asked the two why aren't they Umno members. Their answers were simple but puzzling.

Said Puan Nor: "I submitted my application a few years ago, when I was staying in Petaling.

"I took the trouble to fill up my application form and submitted it, together with a few friends. I sent it to the branch nearest to my house.

"I waited and waited. Nothing happened. I was then advised to send a new application, this time to the headquarters.

"I duly did that, together with a few friends. My husband sent the forms to Menara Dato' Onn since he knows some people there.

"But, apa sudah jadi? (what has happened?). Nothing. No answers, no news. Some other friends even wanted me to go to Umno headquarters and get some answers. I say, susah-lah.

"I think I'll just watch things from the sidelines. If my father is still around, perhaps I have a chance."

Fouad's story is no different. He made repeated attempts to get into the local branch, but the closest he came to being a member was in filling the application form. He made another attempt to get into a different branch, but it's the same old story.

"Are you still trying to be an Umno member?" I asked him.

Today, the father of two is quite happy to listen to stories from his friends and cousins.

He's an ardent fan of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but is wondering why the party machinery is not able to help him with his membership application.

Puan Nor and Fouad may not be the only people finding it hard to get

into Umno. At a time when the party needs all the support it could get from the Malays, the two just couldn't understand why their interest has not been recognised.

Pas especially has not stopped campaigning and is seen moving in many areas trying to make friends and recruit members.

Puan Nor and Fouad may not be attracted to the party, but there are others who are.

I asked around why Umno, or some people in Umno, make it difficult for others to join.

I found out that there's a selfish reason for this.

Local branch leaders are usually wary of new faces, especially if they are somewhat more qualified academically or professionally.

The local leaders feel threatened, and would find reasons not to entertain new applications.

This is a disease that the party leaders have to sort out quickly.

Puan Nor and Fouad, and others like them, should at least be told why their applications are rejected. This is basic courtesy.

If Puan Nor and Fouad want to seek some comfort, the son of a senior civil servant also went through the same experience. He's given up, of course

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