

EC chief, deputy admit they 'could have been' Umno members
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, April 27 — Both the Election Commission (EC) chairman and deputy chairman have admitted that they could have been Umno members a long time ago, but stressed that it did not affect their ability to carry out their professional duties.

Chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof and his deputy Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar took great pains to point out that it (being Umno members) happened a long time ago, and that they were inactive members, having not paid any fees or attended any party meetings.

Abdul Aziz can't remember when and where he became an Umno member. — Picture by Choo Choy May

"I can't remember when and where I once became an Umno member, anyone could have put my name in after I graduated from university in the 1970s.

"I can't even remember which branch (I was an Umno member in) because after I finished my studies I lived in several areas — Segambut, Selayang and Ampang. So if anyone had named me (as an Umno member) I don't know which branch," Abdul Aziz told Sinar Harian.

Wan Ahmad confirmed that he was an Umno member, but like Abdul Aziz, he too claimed he could not remember which Umno branch he was registered in.

When asked whether he was still an Umno member, Wan Ahmad said: "I don't know and have never bothered to find out. I am not a politician, I am a government servant and this has stayed till this day. I am speaking the truth."

Wan Ahmad stressed that all government servants were barred from being active members in any political party, and that they had to relinquish their government posts if they wanted to do so.

"I am still in service (as a government) servant) and that it proof that I am not an active (Umno) member," he said.

Similarly, Abdul Aziz said that being an Umno member did not make him biased in any way when it came to running the EC.

"I've never felt tied down in all my years here (in the EC)," he said.

Both the EC chief and deputy chief were accused yesterday of being Umno members, with a senior PKR official alleging that he had evidence of their membership in the ruling party.

The duo have come under intense scrutiny in the past year over claims of fraud in election practices and the electoral roll as federal polls draw near.

"I know Aziz's membership number and I have information on which branch Tan Sri Aziz and his deputy are from.

"This is the only EC in the world where its chief and his deputy are officially members of a party that contests elections," Sinar Harian quoted PKR secretary-general Datuk Saifuddin Nasution as saying.

The Machang MP then challenged the duo to prove they were not members of the senior party in the ruling coalition, failing which he would reveal the branches to which he alleged they belong.

He also told the Malay-language national daily that Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia, who quit the Kota Marudu Umno when he was appointed Dewan Rakyat Speaker in 2008, had informed him that the EC's top two officers were still party members.

The EC was heavily criticised in the lead-up to Bersih's rally for free and fair elections on July 9 last year in which tens of thousands flooded the streets of the capital in chaotic scenes that saw over 1,500 arrested, scores injured and the death of an ex-soldier.

Widespread condemnation of the Najib administration's clampdown saw Putrajaya make major concessions including announcing a bipartisan Parliamentary Select Committee to look into improving the electoral system.

During the committee's six-month tenure, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) accused the EC of not being committed to reforms and eventually rejected the panel's findings.

Early this month, Bersih, a coalition of 84 civil societies, also announced a sit-in protest at Dataran Merdeka for tomorrow, saying the findings of the select committee were disappointing and did not meet its demands for electoral reform.

Abdul Aziz became EC chairman on January 2009 while Wan Ahmad was appointed in 2007.

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