

## **Judge disqualifies himself from Najib vs Pua shariah bill-related suit**

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**By V Anbalagan**

**The former Umno politician and deputy home minister says public perception of the independence of the judiciary should not be shaken in any way.**

KUALA LUMPUR: Judicial commissioner Wan Ahmad Farid Wan Salleh, who was a deputy home minister before being made judge, has recused himself from hearing a defamation suit filed by Najib Razak.

He said this was because the public perception of the independence of the judiciary should not be shaken in any way.

In a statement, Wan Ahmad said it was common knowledge that he was an active politician, and at one time a member of former prime minister Abdullah Badawi's administration and a Dewan Negara member.

In January 2009, Wan Ahmad, an Umno leader, contested and lost in a by-election for the Kuala Terengganu parliamentary seat to a PAS candidate.

He was appointed judicial commissioner on Dec 15, 2015.

"On the eve of my appointment to the bench, I had resigned from the political party that I used to be a member of. And I must add that I was never a member of the administration that was headed by the plaintiff (Najib)," he said.

He said after taking the oath as a member of the judiciary, "my only sacred duty is to preserve, protect and defend the Federal Constitution without fear or favour".

Wan Farid said an independent judiciary was a precious gift to any society.

"Once it is lost, society will be on the verge of collapse. The independence of the judiciary must be defended at any cost," he added.

Wan Farid said he would inform the managing judge and the Chief Judge of Malaya of his recusal.

In the meantime, he said, the case would go before a deputy registrar for case management on May 31

Wan Farid, with the consent of both parties, also extended the interim injunction earlier given to Najib until a new judge is appointed to hear the case.

Today, a hearing was scheduled on whether Najib's application to stop Petaling Jaya Utara MP Tony Pua from uploading an offensive video in his Facebook account should be maintained pending the outcome of the prime minister's defamation suit.

The video was over the tabling of the Shariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (Act 355), which seeks to increase punishments for shariah offences.

Najib, in his statement of claim, said on April 6 that Pua had made a statement via video at the Parliament building area.

The recording was uploaded on Pua's Facebook page "Tony Pua", entitled "BN abandons all Bills to give precedence to PAS RUU355 Private Member's Bill". Najib said the live video was directed at him and done with malice and bad intention to defame him.

The video clip in question was uploaded shortly after the tabling of PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang's motion on amendments to enhance the powers of the shariah courts.

Lawyer Gobind Singh Deo, who represented Pua, said Wan Farid's decision to disqualify himself was correct.

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