

# AMP director quits, alleging official pressure

## But minister and association chairman deny interference with its management

By **ANDREA ONG** and **ELGIN TOH**

LAWYER and civil society activist Nizam Ismail, 46, resigned from the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) this week, a move he claimed was motivated by government intervention.

Mr Nizam – who stepped down on Monday as chairman of AMP’s research arm and as an AMP board director – said he did so because the Government threatened to cut AMP’s funding after taking issue with his comments online and his participation in two

political events.

Both Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim and AMP chairman Azmoon Ahmad stressed, however, that the Government did not interfere with the management of the association.

In a statement yesterday, Mr Azmoon dismissed Mr Nizam’s claims as “inaccurate”.

“I would like to clarify that any suggestion that external parties whom AMP work with influence the decisions that I (as AMP chairman) or the AMP board make

is inaccurate.”

AMP is a movement which aims to uplift the Malay-Muslim community and “holds closely to our core principles of independence, non-partisanship and critical collaboration with all parties that share our mission in the community”, he said.

He added that Mr Nizam decided to resign “to avoid further misperception” that he reflected AMP’s official stand on political and civil society issues.

Asked by reporters last night on the sidelines of a dialogue organised by government feedback unit Reach, Dr Yaacob said: “AMP is an important partner. In our discussions with AMP, we have never touched on their inter-

nal organisation, how they are being managed.”

He also noted that the association has “written in its Constitution that whoever is involved in AMP must be non-partisan and we assume therefore not involved in politics”.

He said the Government was more concerned with the work they do as they receive public funds.

Dr Yaacob added: “Money which is given by the Government to Malay-Muslim organisations must be for the purpose of voluntary work that will help the community move forward. It is not for the purpose of creating a platform for people to be involved in partisan politics.”

In February, Mr Nizam spoke at the Population White Paper protest at Speakers’ Corner.

Last month, he was on the panel at a forum on race issues organised by the Workers’ Party Youth Wing.

He stated that he spoke in his personal capacity at both events.

Yesterday, he told The Straits Times that AMP had informed him over the weekend that two ministers had “expressed concern” about some critical views he had put forth online and his participation in the two events.

He declined to name the ministers.

He said he was presented with two options. One, if he did not “tone down” his activities, the

Government would withdraw funding from AMP. Two, dissociate himself from AMP if he wanted to continue with civil society activities.

A check of financial statements on AMP’s website shows the association received a government matching grant of \$1 million annually over the last five years.

Mr Nizam was chairman of AMP from 2009 to 2011 and founding president of its youth wing.

Mr Nizam also clarified that he is not a member of any political party and “the circumstances behind me leaving AMP have got nothing to do with any intention of joining any political party”.

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