

'Vile reaction' UNEXPECTED

Social activist Nizam Ismail surprised at reaction towards his exit from AMP

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HE KNEW some of his ideas were controversial, like pushing for racial politics. And Mr Nizam Ismail, 46, expected his moves to be challenged.

But what he didn't expect was his personal life to be the fodder for online chatter and come under media scrutiny.

Like his alleged flashy lifestyle. A picture of him in racing gear standing next to a performance car has been making the rounds online.

The lawyer and social activist told The New Paper that the picture was taken during a go-kart race recently.

But the online chatter grew louder after he resigned in protest as director of Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) and as chairman of the Board of the Centre for Research on Malay and Islamic Affairs. (See report at right.)

And soon enough, Mr Nizam became the latest in a series of people who, after stepping into the political arena, had their personal life scrutinised.

Now even those in civil society like Mr Nizam have not been spared.

And the reaction has come thick and fast online



Govt does not interfere with AMP

MR NIZAM Ismail said he resigned because the Government had allegedly threatened to cut AMP's funding after taking issue with his comments online and his participation in two political events.

This he told The Straits Times in an April 23 interview.

But both Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim and AMP chairman Azmoon Ahmad said the Government did not interfere with the management of AMP.

In a statement on April 23, Mr Azmoon dismissed Mr Nizam's claims as "inaccurate".

In an interview with Malay newspaper Berita Harian, Mr Azmoon said AMP will resolve to put an end to the issue "so that it will not cause a split or harm the Malay/Muslim community".

Speaking on the sidelines of a dialogue organised by Government feedback unit Reach that same day, Dr Yaacob said: "AMP is an important partner. In our discussions

with AMP, we have never touched on their internal organisation, how they are being managed.

Move forward

"Money 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."

AMP also said in a statement yesterday that it was committed to serve the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore, despite the undue media attention that the Association has received in recent weeks.

"AMP continues to be guided by its core principles of being independent, non-partisan and working in collaboration with all parties that identify with and support its aspiration to build a Dynamic Muslim Community," the statement added.

SCRUTINISED:
 Mr Nizam Ismail's personal life has come under scrutiny.

PICTURE: BERITA HARIAN

Tan hopes this will end.

"I certainly hope this will not be par for the course. We ought to separate the private and the political where the former is not relevant to the latter," he said.

"Here it is not clear that Nizam has put himself out as a political protagonist, even though in Singapore, there is the expectation that people in public life should expect their private lives to be put under scrutiny."

Ms Braema Mathi, the president of human rights association Maruah, also feels personal life should stay out of the public domain.

"This kind of approach would instil fear and would not encourage people to take part in civil society and politics in general," she said.

Fear? That notion is "extremely exaggerated", argued National University of Singapore political science lecturer Bilveer Singh.

"If you want to be involved in public office, you have to be sterling clean - this is the expectation of society at large," he said.

And transparent about the motives.

In a letter to The Straits Times forum page yesterday, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth said Mr Nizam "is entitled to pursue his political activities (but) he should not use AMP as a platform and a cover to promote his race-based politics."

So, is this the end of Mr Nizam's foray into the political sphere?

Though he started off saying he won't enter politics, he softened his stance at the end. Politics next?

"Let's not speculate but as things stand, I have no intentions to join a political party now," he said.

following an article in Malay-language newspaper Berita Minggu last Sunday.

The article gave details behind Mr Nizam's failed first marriage and his current state of unemployment. He had previously held senior positions in two investment banks.

"I did not expect such a vile reaction to my exit (from AMP)," he said.

"People have asked me what good would it do for others to know the details of my first marriage.

No sinister motive

"There was never any sinister motive to my departure, nor am I leaving my position to join politics."

He quit AMP last week after internal disagreements. But is he really not entering politics?

In February, he spoke at the Population White Paper protest at Speakers' Corner.

And last month, he was on the panel at a forum

on race issues organised by the Workers' Party (WP) Youth Wing.

He insisted that he spoke then in a personal capacity.

Mr Nizam said: "I am just a sworn believer of civil society discussions as I believe there is a strong need for Singapore to welcome different voices."

Not everyone agrees with the man who was chairman of AMP from 2009 to 2011 and also the founding president of its youth wing.

In speaking on race issues at the WP event, some netizens accused him of playing the race card. The knives were sharpened.

"It is strange to be thrust into the limelight this way but upon reflection, I had acted with a clear conscience," said Mr Nizam, adding that he was disappointed by the Berita Minggu article, and that all the scrutiny has caused distress to his family and has no relevance on him leaving AMP.

Nominated Member of Parliament and Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene