

Shafie: Even the president of Umno once left the party

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By Nigel Aw

Rural and Regional Development Minister Mohd Shafie Apdal today said that Umno had seen its leaders depart from the party before including former Umno president Onn Jaafar in 1951.

The powerful Sabah leader who leads the Sampoena Umno Division, was commenting on his fellow Sabahan colleague Beaufort MP Lajim Ukin's statement that he was prepared to be sacked by Umno.

Lajim who is Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister has resigned as Kerambai Kebatu Umno branch chief and made public that he will not defend his position as Beaufort Umno division chief but will remain in the party.

"For BN, all this is part of politics, we (Umno) had gone through all the process including being outlawed, having the deputy president leaving the party, even the president left the party once before.

"So it's nothing new to us. As a political party, whatever situation we face, we will overcome. The impact may be small or big, but it will not harm us," Shafie told a press conference in Bangsar this afternoon.

It was widely speculated on June 10 that Lajim was to appear alongside Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim in Sabah to announce his defection to PKR.

However, Lajim later denied this after the appearance did not materialise as Anwar's flight was delayed due to bad weather.

Claims dismissed

Last Thursday, Lajim said he was prepared to relinquish his position as a deputy minister to "uphold Sabah's rights" and expected to be axed by Umno for this, adding that he is keeping his options open on his political future including joining the opposition.

However, Shafie dismissed the claims that Lajim would defect as mere speculation, adding that it has been going on since last year.

"We do not know if this is true or not but he had denied it. If people have denied how can we not believe it?" he said.

He added that what was important for Lajim was to execute his duties and responsibilities as a MP.

"And what is important to us, we will see and help," he said.

Entertainers for Umno

Meanwhile, commenting on the widely publicised entry of artists into rival party PAS, Shafie said there were similarly eminent persons from the entertainment industry who supported Umno.

"We also have supporters (from the industry) but we do not publicise it (like PAS does).

"What is important is not only do they support the government, but the government also supports the industry," he said.

PAS has recently gone on the offensive in recruiting artists such as the likes of singer Wan Aishah Wan Ariffin and actor Hairie Othman.

Umno too has its line of backers from the entertainment industry, including singer and actor Afdlin Shauki and rocker Amy Search.

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