

Umno veep: Sabah BN should not take defections lightly

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By Aidila Razak

Umno vice-president Shafie Apdal said the string of defections from BN Sabah to PKR is unlikely to affect polls outcome in the Borneo state, but "should not be taken lightly".

"It's part of politics and I feel we should look at it seriously," he said today.

"(But) I am confident it will not disrupt (BN's) ability in the polls (as) a (defected) leader's supporters won't necessarily follow suit."

Former Tanjung Aru Umno division chief Yahya Lampong had quit the party and joined PKR, just hours after former Sabah Umno treasurer Ibrahim Menudin did the same on Sept 15.

The defections follow those of BN MPs Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing (Tuaran) and Lajim Ukin (Beaufort), who resigned from their respective parties.

Shafie, who is rural development minister, also advised Umno and BN grassroots members to maintain their focus on the general election even if it appears that there are "problems in the leadership"

Asked if he is concerned that the BN defectors will air the federal ruling coalition's dirty linen in public, he said: "There is nothing to expose. Anwar Ibrahim was the deputy president of Umno. Ibrahim was only the treasurer (of Sabah Umno).

"I'm certain it will not cause disruptions. Sabah had gone through challenging political times before and we use this experience to ensure stability within the party."

Felcra-Risda MOU

Shafie said this after witnessing the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (Risda) and Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (Felcra).

The MOU will enable these agencies to cooperate in a replanting programme costing RM54.38 million from this year to 2014.

It will involve oil palm and rubber on 7,390 hectares of land held by more than 3,700 smallholders,

"I hope there will be movement on the ground and that I will not be called again in a year's time to witness yet another MOU signing," he quipped.

In his speech, Shafie said the agencies should focus on stabilising the smallholders' income in the face of fluctuating commodity prices.

palm oil palm kelapa sawit 201107 "If the returns are attractive, more people will be attracted to the industry... but if there is oversupply, prices will go down. This must be mitigated," he said.

Risda and Felcra, he said, should also look into the promotion of their products overseas, as well as research into new uses, especially for natural rubber, with a view of expanding and stabilising demand.

He said the agencies should establish partnerships with local universities which are already doing research in the area.

"Productivity should also grow, by applying scientific methods, so you can use little land for greater returns," he said, calling for more research into seedlings and fertilisers to improve yields.

The MOU was signed by Risda chairperson Rahim Thamby Chik, Risda director Wan Mohamad Zuki, Felcra chairperson Tajuddin Abdul Rahman and Felcra executive director Juzilman Basir.

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