

'Umno won't enter Sarawak with Taib gone'

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It is mere assumption and a bad intention to claim that Umno will spread its wings to Sarawak with the eminent retirement of its Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Umno vice-president Mohd Shafie Apdal said today that it was not Umno's agenda for Taib to retire so that the party could enter the state.

Speaking to the media after inspecting the construction work on the second phase of the Kapit/Song/Kanowit Road project in Kapit, he said it was the opposition's assumption that he (Taib) was forced to retire.

"Umno's stand is consistent. We will not spread our wings to Sarawak as we do not want to disunite the people.

"The situation in Sarawak is completely different from Sabah when Umno entered it. Sarawak has a very stable state government, so why should we interfere? We only enter into a system when there is the need for us to do so."

Shafie said what was of paramount importance, was the continuation of the state's development and progress.

On Taib's desire to step down after helming the state for 33 years as its chief minister, Shafie - who is also rural and regional development minister - said his decision should be respected.

"He had, in fact, stated his desire to step down on a number of occasions, but was waiting for the right time. After discussing the matter with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, he believes now is the right time for him to do so.

"We really appreciate his efforts in turning Sarawak into one of the most developed and progressive states in the country. This is something not easy to accomplish," he said.

Shafie added that it was important, too, that the power transition proceeded smoothly.

"Whoever replaces him should not be seen purely from his personality, but that he can further enhance Taib's sterling efforts for Sarawak.

"In BN, the transition of power has always been smooth with no conflict. We don't quarrel like the opposition in Selangor where they even go to the extent of wanting to call for a fresh by-election, which is a sheer waste of public funds," he said.

Shafie noted that the federal government deeply appreciated Taib's many contributions not only to the state, but to the federal government as well, which he had also served.

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