

Sabah MP quits Umno post, denies jumping ship
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 30 — Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin has confirmed his resignation as Kerambai Kebatu Umno branch chief earlier this month but maintained he was not leaving the party to join the opposition, the Borneo Post reported today.

The vocal Umno supreme council member has been repeatedly rumoured to be part of a Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN) crossover to PKR earlier this month, having said “nothing is impossible in politics” and adding that he will make a switch if such was desired by his constituents.

“So far, I have no intention (of leaving Umno) but what we want are changes and improvements especially in the state leadership,” the Sabah paper quoted Lajim as saying.

He stressed that his decision to quit did not mean he was leaving the party, but to make way for “younger and more active candidates with potentials to become a leader at division level.”

“In fact, I may also probably not contest in the 13th general election ... maybe I would not be given an opportunity ... so it is better to hand over the post earlier,” he was quoted as saying.

The deputy minister of housing and local government has repeatedly called for changes in Sabah’s leadership, saying that there is no room for those who only “think about the future of their friends.”

Federal seats in east Malaysia’s Sabah and Sarawak are expected to be the opposition Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) focal point come the elections as both states, including the federal territory of Labuan, contain 57 federal constituencies, or 25 per cent of the 222 parliamentary seats available.

In Election 2008, BN retained power over Putrajaya largely due to wins in east Malaysia and Labuan, where it made a near-clean sweep, winning 55 seats against PR’s two.

But the ruling pact lost its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority after only securing a five-seat margin over PR in the peninsula, winning in just 85 constituencies versus the 80 that the opposition pact secured.

In Sabah, the deep-seated issue of illegal immigrants will likely be used as a key campaign issue in the coming polls, with the Najib administration holding the trump card for having finally agreed to investigate the issue by forming a royal commission of inquiry to investigate the matter.

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