

Sabah Umno renegade sacked from federal post
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 31 — The Barisan Nasional (BN) federal government moved today to sack renegade Sabah Umno leader Datuk Seri Lajim Ukim as the deputy housing minister.

In a statement issued through national news agency Bernama, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, had consented to revoking the appointment of Lajim (picture) as deputy housing and local government minister

The PMO said the revocation would take immediate effect.

Lajim quit all party posts last week and aligned himself with the federal opposition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), last weekend.

The Beaufort MP, who did not quit his deputy minister post, was given 14 days yesterday by Umno to explain to the party why he should not be sacked for his actions.

Lajim was until his resignation a member of the Umno supreme council, the ruling party's highest decision-making body.

His decision to back PR has been talked up as a big scalp for the opposition ahead of general elections.

On Sunday, Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Bumburing also announced he was quitting the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) and pledged to aid the rival PR pact.

The former Sabah deputy chief minister said he would kick off a state-wide tour in support of the federal opposition ahead of the 13th general elections.

He cited the widespread influx of illegal immigrants into the eastern state and Putrajaya's oversight on this issue as among the chief reasons prompting his exit.

Bumburing is deputy president of BN component party, United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO).

The exit of the two BN leaders over the weekend is likely to delay a general election from a firm September date to the end of the year as the ruling coalition works to retain its "fixed deposit" in the Borneo states, say sources.

BN sources in Sabah and Kuala Lumpur say the pledge by Bumburing and Lajim to support PR is among the reasons why Datuk Seri Najib Razak is reconsidering dates for a snap poll after Budget Day on September 28 for his personal mandate, some three years and three months after taking power in April 2009.

Political analysts say BN has always treated Sabah and Sarawak as a sure-fire vote bank as it battles to regain the dominant Malay vote in the peninsula.

Najib's government has seen a slide in approval ratings with only 42 per cent giving the nod to his administration in a June survey carried out by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research in Peninsular Malaysia, a drop of six percentage points from a month earlier.

But the prime minister remains popular, with a 64 per cent approval rating in June, down from 65 per cent in May. His predecessor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, went into Election 2008 with a 71 per cent approval rating but lost the customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four states.

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