

Umno grassroots torn as Muhyiddin, Shafie no longer welcome at meetings

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By Md Izwan

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal's sacking from the Cabinet is creating a dilemma for Umno grassroots leaders, as they are torn between respecting the two party leaders and remaining loyal to Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Several Umno divisions have cancelled the invitations they had sent to Muhyiddin and Shafie to officiate at their annual general meetings, despite the fact that the duo's positions in the party remain unchanged.

Muhyiddin, the deputy president, was to officiate Raub Umno's AGM on August 15, but the division has now cancelled the officiating ceremony altogether.

Muhyiddin was dropped as deputy prime minister and education minister in a Cabinet reshuffle yesterday that comes amid investigations by a special government task force into alleged financial scandal at state investment firm 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB).

Shafie, an Umno vice-president, was also dropped as a minister.

Both men had openly criticised Putrajaya's handling of the firm, which has racked up debts of RM42 billion. The firm is owned by the Finance Ministry, which is led by Najib, who is also chairman of 1MDB's advisory board.

A source from Umno said they were worried Muhyiddin may criticise Najib and 1MDB in his speeches at party division meetings.

"We're worried we will be seen as going against the tide, post-Cabinet reshuffle," the source told The Malaysian Insider on condition of anonymity.

"What if he delivers another fiery speech like the one during the Cheras Umno division meeting? That's what we're worried about."

At the Cheras Umno meeting last Sunday, Muhyiddin had questioned the scandal surrounding 1MDB's RM42 billion debts, and The Wall Street Journal expose of money from companies linked to it allegedly being channelled into the prime minister's accounts.

This prompted the Prime Minister's Office to issue a statement the next day asking everyone to be patient and await the final result of the special task force's investigation into 1MDB.

Umno divisions in Batu Gajah and Ipoh Barat have also cancelled their invitations to Shafie, who was scheduled to officiate their meetings this weekend.

When contacted, a spokesperson from Batu Gajah Umno's headquarters said they withdrew Shafie's invitation given the latest developments.

"We didn't know this would happen, but to prevent any quarters from misinterpreting the situation, we had to cancel it," said the Batu Gajah Umno source.

But he denied that Najib had ordered them to cancel the invitation.

"There were no directives from anyone, we made this decision after meeting and taking into account the views of all the division's committee members."

Umno member and political observer Shahbudin Husin said the turmoil stemmed from the fact that Muhyiddin and Shafie were still party leaders, even though Najib had sacked them from the Cabinet.

"They are the deputy president and vice-president. They are still Umno leaders, we respect them. But given the struggle now, we can't be seen as siding any quarter," he said.

He said things may change if Najib sacked the duo from Umno, but added that this would not be easy.

"The situation is different, Najib has no concrete reason to sack Muhyiddin and Shafie (from the party), unless he had a case against them and can justify it," said Shahbudin. – July 29, 2015.

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