

Ezam - the 'new force' in S'gor Umno?

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Amidst the talk of a split between the two Umno Selangor figureheads - state party liaison deputy chief Noh Omar and former menteri besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo - there is fresh speculation that former PKR Youth chief Ezam Mohd Nor is being groomed for bigger things in the state.

bukit gantang by election umno ezam ceramah 300309 03After being touted as one of the headliners in the first prong of the 'Save Selangor' campaign by Umno to recapture the state, Ezam's schedule is now booked with choeful of ceramah engagements with the first one last night in Section 17, Shah Alam.

But the path has already been laid out for the one-time PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's protege to step up in the hustings. Ezam has been going around the state, delivering speeches, mainly to discredit his former boss.

While many Umno leaders have refused to go on record when contacted regarding the matter, it is widely speculated that for Ezam's meteoric rise in Selangor can only be credited to Prime Minister Najib Razak.

It is no secret that during Ezam's time in PKR, the charismatic and eloquent speaker had carved a name for himself, extending his influence over many parts of the country.

When he abandoned the party back in 2007, it took him nearly a year to rejoin Umno - an extremely calculated move after having mobilised several other key party leaders to follow him, almost crippling the PKR Youth wing at the same time.

ezam joins back umno 280508 04And while he returned to the party at the tail-end of former prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's reign in the party - a move also said to be engineered by Abdullah's son-in-law and current Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin - it is now Najib, the Umno Selangor chief, who is making full use of Ezam.

But even now, especially after Ezam was appointed Senator in April, the 43-year-old politician's rapid escalation within Umno ranks sits uncomfortably with some party elders.

Khair Toyo 'systematically sidelined'

Sources have said that party veterans, especially those in Khir's camp have been left in a lurch after being "systematically sidelined", to make way for a relative newcomer like Ezam.

It is said that his seniors in Dewan Negara are so wary of associating themselves with Ezam, they refuse to socialise with him to the extent of leaving him alone to his meals at the Parliament cafeteria.

NONEHis former colleague in PKR Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad (left), Seri Setia assemblyperson, also had choice words for Ezam, using the old Malay adage 'jin cari tuan' (genie looking for a master).

"I'm not surprised if Umno wants to take him in for this purpose. But it is still a rocky road for him. The party elders have stayed with the party through thick and thin. I don't see how they would want to accept him, now," said Nik Nazmi, who was one of the founding members of an anti-corruption NGO Gerak, once helmed by Ezam.

A source close to Ezam, having been a PKR member before leaving for Umno together with him, also said that Ezam's thrust into the spotlight is "new".

According to him, Ezam was given the role to spearhead the 'Selangor Darul Ehsan Secretariat', an initiative by Noh, who is also the agriculture and agro-based minister.

NONE However, even the source scoffed at claims that the Umno bigwigs are grooming Ezam for bigger things in Selangor in a plan to elbow Khir out of the way.

“Although Khir is not involved in the first phase of the Save Selangor campaign, he may appear in the second phase,” said the source.

In the first phase ending on Aug 8, there will be 19 ceramah in 18 spots across all the state. Ezam is tipped to speak at nearly all of the functions.

And with Khir who was the state liaison chief for eight years since 2000 to not even appear at the launch of the campaign by Najib back in April, one can only expect a new force to take the reins - either Ezam or Noh himself.

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