

**Johor Umno Youth chief replaced in polls power play, say sources**  
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**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, July 16 — A power tussle in Johor has led to the state Umno Youth chief being replaced with a neutral choice over the weekend as Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman attempts to buttress his position and remain in office for a fifth term in the party's birthplace after the next general election, say sources.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin named Parit Sulong Youth chief Datuk Zulkurnain Kamisan on Saturday to replace Mohd Fadil Muskon, whom sources say fell out with Ghani (picture) after organising the June 10 loyalty gathering for the state Ruler over his purchase of the WWW 1 car registration number plate.

"Fadil was asked not to organise the event because it might be negative for Umno. Since then, his star fell and the state leadership asked for a change," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

The Himpunan Menjunjung Taat Setia (Gathering to pledge loyalty) event at the Istana Pasir Pelangi grounds drew a large crowd but only a few state Umno leaders showed up to show support to Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar. It is learnt that the state Umno wanted to distance itself from the Ruler's RM520,000 bid for the number during a time of economic belt-tightening.

But Fadil went ahead with the event after getting support from most Johor folk who are fiercely loyal to their state Ruler, whom they felt was insulted by reports that former Perak Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Nizar Jamaluddin had questioned the bid. The original Umno was launched in the state palace grounds in 1946, reflecting the close ties between the party and Johor royalty.

"Despite close ties with the royalty, the state leadership doesn't brook any nonsense or challenge to its directives especially at a crucial time for Ghani who wants to remain in Johor. So they came down hard on Fadil," said another party source.

There has been talk that Ghani might be promoted to the federal level in the next general election although mainstream newspapers have been reporting that the four-term mentri besar is close to Sultan Ibrahim. A few names including Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin and Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Razali Ibrahim have been touted as possible Umno replacements for the top state job.

Political foes PAS had said that 16 state Umno Youth division leaders were also against Fadil, who is allied to Khairy, but the Umno Youth chief had denied the revamp was due to factionalism.

Tebrau Umno Youth head Syahrin Jamaludin, who is one of the 16 Umno Youth division heads said to oppose Fadil, was reported to have refuted the allegation and described PAS as "cooking up stories" as it had no issues to raise.

But sources said the 16 had wanted Razali to be made the state Umno Youth leader while Ghani was said to be supporting Bakri Umno Youth chief Mohd Fuad Tukirin for the top state post, reflecting the factionalism in the party.

"It is tough for Khairy and he decided to choose for the party's future by getting someone neutral to lead the state chapter," one source said.

Fadil, however, has been appointed special officer to assist the Umno Youth chief in the Barisan Nasional (BN) Youth secretariat.

Khairy had said the appointment was a minor reshuffle in preparation to face the 13th general election and new state Youth chief Zulkurnain must strengthen the movement to reach more youths, the majority of whom were fence-sitters.

Two weeks ago, the Umno Youth chief had played down rumours of Fadil's dismissal from the post in a restructuring by saying that revamps had also been done in Penang, Perak, Selangor and Sabah.

"This is normal, nothing unusual. In Penang, Selangor and Sabah, I have already made changes at the state Youth leadership. So, for the other states, I'm looking at the situation; if need be, will change," he had said then, mentioning that Johor could also see a change,

Umno sources said the changes reflect fissures within the party, especially between the Youth and the party's main wing.

"The Youth have ideas and want to reach out to everyone, from royalty to the man in the street, but those in senior positions are just looking out to defend their turf. Fadil's fate is a case in point," one source said.

They added that Zulkurnain will have a tough time to mobilise the movement in Johor as factionalism could slow him down, especially if elections are held sooner than later. "Umno can win big if everyone works together. That's the big if," added another party source.

Some 12 million voters are eligible to vote in the next federal and state elections if all states agree to a common date. The four Pakatan Rakyat-ruled (PR) states have balked at dissolving their state legislatures ahead of their five-year mandate which expires next April.

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