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Well, I can still smile, is all Youth chief will say

"WELL, I can still smile" was all that Youth Chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi could say to reporters at the end of the Umno General Assembly yesterday, hardly an hour after party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad ticked him off for making allegations of collusion, cronyism and nepotism.

Ahmad Zahid tried to avoid reporters by leaving through the Putra World Trade Centre's rear exit, but failed as reporters were waiting at all exits.

Just before getting into his limousine, he shook hands and thanked reporters for their support.

Dr Mahathir, when replying to points raised at the end of the three-day general assembly yesterday, said Ahmad Zahid, who is a supreme council member, should have raised such grouses at council meetings and not in public.

The Prime Minister stressed there had not been cronyism nor nepotism in the award of contracts as claimed by Ahmad Zahid, as they had been distributed fairly among capable businessmen - some of whom the Government had not even been familiar with.

Earlier, Ahmad Zahid said his name was on the list of those awarded privatised projects because he was a trustee for Yayasan Gerak Bakti Kebangsaan, a foundation set up by the movement in 1983.

He said the foundation had shares in a joint-venture company awarded the privatised project long before he became Umno Youth chief.

"I don't have even a single share in the said company," he said.

The list released by Dr Mahathir on Saturday, named Ahmad Zahid as one of the major shareholders of Pantai Dalam Sdn Bhd. The company had been awarded, in principle, a project to develop Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukum in Kuala Lumpur.

Ahmad Zahid said the project had not even got off the ground yet.

He said he hoped his clarification would avoid any confusion and misinterpretation.

Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth thanked the Government for being responsive to the movement's earlier call by revealing the list of those who received privatisation concessions.

He added that this was parallel to the movement's call for transparency.

Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth was hopeful that companies awarded the concessions would ensure the projects and wealth filtered down to small Malay businessmen, contractors and entrepreneurs.

He said this would be in line with the spirit of the New Economic Policy which sought a fair distribution of wealth among the people.

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