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Ex-aide: Zahid a weak person, so forgive him

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Describing Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as a weak person, his former Press aide today appealed to Malaysians to "forgive" Zahid for admitting Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's role in a controversial speech last year.

Zahid told the Press at the Umno general assembly on Sunday that Anwar, then the Umno deputy president, had asked him to raise the issue of nepotism, cronyism and wealth distribution in his keynote address as Youth leader at last year's assembly.

This has triggered a rebuke from Hanafiah Man, Zahid's one-time Press officer and who is now Perak Youth leader of Parti Keadilan Nasional.

In a statement today, Hanafiah said as he was responsible for drafting and preparing Zahid's speeches when he was Umno Youth leader, he (Hanafiah) knew perfectly the style of the particular speech and how it was prepared.

He added that the issue of nepotism and cronyism was first raised at the Kongres Pemantapan Ekonomi Bumiputera (a congress on the economy of the Bumiputeras) in June 1998.

At that time, Hanafiah said, the nepotism and cronyism issue came about as a result of information which Umno Youth had, and that it wanted the issue to be raised without fear or favour.

"Therefore, it is a lie to say that a speech touching on the issue of nepotism and cronyism was made on the directive or conspiracy of certain quarters.

"I dare say this as it was me who drafted the speech," Hanafiah said.

He said the same applied to Zahid's keynote address at last year's Umno Youth Assembly, which was not engineered or made on the directive of anyone including Anwar.

Instead, Hanafiah said as in 1997, Zahid had a series of meetings with various parties, adding that he remembered Zahid saying that Anwar had asked him not to raise the issue of nepotism and cronyism so as not to offend the Umno president (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad).

Hanafiah said being weak, Zahid could have come under pressure to confess. Hanafiah's statement, however, contradicted an open admission by Anwar in Kuala Terengganu on Sept 18 that he instructed Zahid to raise the issue of nepotism, cronyism and corruption at last year's Assembly.

(END)