

Zahidi offers full apology for remark on Veveonah

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DEPUTY Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Zahidi Zainul Abidin (*picture*) has apologised for his statement on Sabahan student Veveonah Mosibin, after receiving a directive to make a public apology from Dewan Negara Speaker Tan Sri Rais Yatim yesterday.

“I would like to apologise for causing confusion in the Senate on this matter. I would also like to apologise that the information given by Kudat MP (Datuk Abdul Rahim Bakri) had caused some dissatisfaction among some quarters.

“Perhaps, my views were misinterpreted. There are network coverage and Internet centres in the Pitas district in Sabah. However, they must be improved. What Veveonah highlighted were deficiencies in Kampung Sipitang, Pitas, that require attention,” Zahidi said.

His apology came a week after he alleged that Veveonah did not sit for an exam and was merely creating content for YouTube.

Zahidi apologised online, but later claimed that he received the information from Abdul Rahim, who sourced it from a senior lecturer at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

Abdul Rahim, in a post which has since been deleted, insisted that the teenager did not sit for an exam as claimed in her video.

Both statements caused a massive backlash online, with many accusing the two deputy ministers of cyberbullying.

The UMS student appeared to have gone off-grid after expressing her disappointment for being accused of putting on a show. However, she forgave Zahidi for making a mistake.

“I take full responsibility and the government agrees that the issue is the lack of Internet connectivity affects Sabah’s rural areas which should be given attention and managed as best as possible,” Zahidi said in his address to the Dewan Negara.

Rais had earlier summoned Zahidi to the Senate and apologise for his misleading statement on Veveonah.

“After much scrutiny and careful deliberation, I have decided that we have to first agree that he comes to this House to provide an explanation and apologise to the relevant party.

“If he refuses to do so, we can refer him to the Rights and Privileges Committee,” he said.

Rais made the ruling in response to a motion filed by Senator Alan Ling Sie Kiong on Monday, which sought to refer Zahidi to the committee for his false claims.

Ling had called for the motion to be fast-tracked from Sept 21 considering recent developments.

On Tuesday, UMS board of directors chairman Datuk Seri Masidi Manjun verified that Veveonah had sat for her examinations online in June, putting an end to several rounds of finger-pointing.

Ling said a sincere apology by Zahidi in the chamber was crucial to uphold the integrity of the Senate.

“I have nothing personal against the deputy minister. This is to defend the honour of the Senate. I hope this episode will not be repeated,” Ling said, following Zahidi’s apology.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin yesterday posted a picture with Veveonah at UMS on Twitter, saying he had apologised to her family on the government’s behalf over the issue.