

Mahathir: Name the AP holders

3 STAR - 9 JUN 2005

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PETALING JAYA: The market is buzzing with rumours of a "king of APs (approved permits to import vehicles)", said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, pointing out that the best way to kill this kind of talk was to name the AP holders.

The former prime minister felt that disclosing the names of AP holders would put the Government in good light.

He recalled that when he was accused of cronyism in giving out contracts a few years ago, he divulged the list of recipients and it was clear that his accusers and their relatives were in fact the ones who had benefited.

"That way, it killed the accusation against me. I don't like to see people make accusations against the Government," he told reporters yesterday after a visit to the Otomotive College.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Proton adviser, admitted that one of his sons had an AP.

"Of course, other people's name should not be mentioned

but my son's name should be mentioned because he's my son," he added.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri

Rafidah Aziz had said recently that it was inappropriate to publicise the names of AP recipients, adding that they were not revealed even when Dr Maha-

thir was prime minister.

Dr Mahathir said that he had raised the matter in Cabinet during his time and asked for an investigation into the issuing

of APs but this was not followed through.

He said the AP system had been there even before he was prime minister, and when he came in, he had cut down the number of AP holders, nearly causing a demonstration against him by people working in Umno headquarters.

This, he said, was because almost everyone working in the headquarters had 10 APs each and was making RM8,000 a month selling them.

But since then, the number of APs issued had grown to 67,000, he added.

He said the AP system was good but they should not be given out without consideration for the national car industry.

Dr Mahathir also said sales of Proton cars had not dropped but since the volume of cars sold in the country had increased due to imports, the percentage of Proton cars sold had gone down.

He said from the 25,000 cars a year that Proton was producing when it first started, the

number was now more than 200,000.

Proton, he added, was able to compete in the country without protection but needed fair competition and a level playing field.

"A lot of people say that Proton is protected. We sometimes dispute that because we are told that completely built-up units are being imported at below cost, sometimes even below the cost of raw materials," he said.

This, he said, was why he had asked for the list of those receiving APs to be made public.

"Then we will know whether Proton is being protected or whether foreign makes are being protected. If it's true as they say that some cars are imported into this country at RM11,000, then there's no way Proton can compete," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's car industry had been trying to enter the market in China for five to six years but it was unable to get a licence to export its cars there.