

Claim that I was rude to Dr M hurts, says Rafidah

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KUALA LUMPUR: Iron lady she might be, but when Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz was accused of being rude to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad whom she likened to a father, she felt the hurt.

Breaking down close to the end of a press conference at the Wanita Umno office, the International Trade and Industry Minister said it saddened her that some people could think that she could be rude to the former prime minister.

After explaining at great length about the AP (approved permit to import cars) list, Rafidah became emotional when she spoke about Dr Mahathir.

Asked why she was crying, she replied: "Because people accuse me.

"I stopped Tun from resigning (sobbing), you know," she said, referring to the time when Dr Mahathir announced at the 2002 Umno general assembly that he was resigning.

She said she was the first to scream and beg him not to quit.

Rafidah added that she had always felt great warmth towards him and always prayed for his good health.

"Don't ever anybody suggest that I was rude to Tun. Oh my God, they don't understand me. They really don't understand me!

"If you think I can be rude to

Tun, you are wrong, you are completely wrong," she said.

Two months ago, Dr Mahathir had questioned the issuance of APs, which he said was hurting Proton.

He had called for the list to be made public.

Rafidah said it had never been government policy to reveal the identity of AP holders, even during Dr Mahathir's time, but disclosed that his son, too, had been given a permit.

On Monday, Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin called on Rafidah to make an open apology to Dr Mahathir, claiming that her remarks were hurtful and disrespectful to him.

Yesterday, Rafidah said she felt no need to apologise.

She said Dr Mahathir was like a father to her and she as a daughter was telling him that he was "not so correct" with his facts and furnishing him with the right information.

"That doesn't mean you don't love your father. It is because you love your father that you correct him. This is where I feel very aggrieved because some people misconstrue, asking me to apologise.

"Does the daughter have to say 'So sorry, dad, I corrected you?' My relationship with him

is such that I cannot possibly be rude to Tun," she said.

Rafidah had sent a letter to Dr Mahathir last week, which included 10 appendixes and minutes of Cabinet meetings explaining some of the issues he had raised about the APs.

She said she was willing to give him further explanations.

Rafidah even related an event that took place while Dr Mahathir was Prime Minister.

She said she found out that all ministers - except her - had given Dr Mahathir birthday presents when Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu thanked him for wearing the tie he had given him.

"I said 'Wah! You gave him a birthday present, ah?' They all (Cabinet ministers) looked at me.

"Tun said: 'Rafidah, you are the only minister who never gives me birthday presents. So I said 'Aiyoh! I'm so sorry'."

Rafidah said she then wrote to Dr Mahathir to apologise for not giving him a birthday present but said her prayers had always been her present to him.

"This relationship with Tun, please don't ever touch it, okay? I have been with him for so long," she said.

■ **Analysis: Can she weather the storm? - See Page 12**