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AP-BULK

FOUR PEOPLE HOLD BULK OF APS THIS YEAR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 18 (Bernama) -- Four people, Tan Sri Nasimuddin SM Amin, Datuk Syed Azman Syed Ibrahim, Datuk Mohd Haniff Abdul Aziz and Datuk Azzuddin Ahmad hold the bulk of the total of 67,158 Approved Permits (APs) to import cars into the country this year, according to a list revealed by the government today.

Of the number, Syed Azman, Mohd Haniff and Azzudin received a total of 15,759 APs under several companies while Nasimuddin, managing director of the Naza Motor Group, held 12,524 APs mainly under Naza Kia Sdn Bhd.

A total of 110 companies were given APs whose shareholders comprising either companies or individuals totalled about 272.

The list of a total of 67,158 APs issued this year was released by the Prime Minister's office this evening amidst the controversy surrounding the issuance of the permits.

It was the first time ever that the names of AP recipients were made public despite statements by government leaders earlier that the policy of not revealing their names would remain.

A press release attached to the list said the government had decided to make public the names of the AP recipients.

It said there are two types of APs, the open AP and the franchise AP.

Under the open AP, the permit holders are allowed to import new and used cars from any sources but the issuance of such APs was stopped in 1988.

Franchise APs are issued to companies which have exclusive agency agreements direct with foreign car manufacturers.

The AP issue made newspaper headlines when former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the issuance of large numbers of these permits had led to unfair competition against the national car, Proton. Dr Mahathir is Proton adviser.

Many importers, said Dr Mahathir, were under-declaring prices and selling these cars at a price that was lower than the real price.

He had questioned how 20 companies were given the bulk of more than 50,000 APs when the government's objective was to assist as many Bumiputera businessmen as possible by spreading out the issuance of such permits.

The AP, issued by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), was introduced in 1970 with the objective of promoting and providing opportunities for Bumiputera entrepreneurs in the automotive sector.

Nasimuddin first got the AP in 1988 while Syed Azman and Mohd Haniff, both former MITI officers, emerged on the scene in 2002.

Nasimuddin's companies are Naza Kia Sdn, Next Car Sdn Bhd, NZ Wheel (M) Sdn Bhd, Nasim Sdn Bhd and Naza Brabus, which import cars such as Kia, Mercedes Benz, Peugeot, Ferrari, Modena, Maserati, Rolls Royce, Bentley and Brabus.

Syed Azman and Mohd Haniff import their cars through companies such as Westcar Motorsport Sdn Bhd, Atlantic Star Auto Sdn Bhd, Auto Pacific Star Sdn Bhd, Go Smartstar Sdn Bhd, Global World Trade Sdn Bhd and Territorial Star Sdn Bhd. The other shareholder of Weststar is Azzuddin.

Their companies import cars such as Honda, Ford, Chevrolet, Smart, Suzuki Audi.

Among other major recipients is Hyumal Motor Sdn Bhd owned by Berjaya Group Bhd, Sime Darby Bhd and Tan Sri Vincent Tan which was issued 8,573

APs for Hyundai cars.

Meanwhile, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who came under fire from Dr Mahathir for the massive issuance of APs, said today she hoped the letter of explanation she sent to the former prime minister last week would resolve all the issues he raised.

"For me... (the matter) has been settled, as the explanation given is clear, concise and complete. I hope with the explanation, the matter would not arise again," she said.

The letter was written on the Cabinet's request that a full explanation detailing the real situation be provided to Dr Mahathir, who is also the adviser to Proton.

Rafidah who declined to give details of the letter, said: "I do not want people to think that what was said by Tun (Mahathir) was correct...I look really bad. Not good...I had to explain."

"As a mark of respect for Tun Mahathir, there is no need to print the contents of the letter", she told reporters. -- BERNAMA

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