

01/09/2005

Mahathir-Rafidah

MAHATHIR SAYS AP ISSUE ALWAYS ABOUT PROTON, NOT RAFIDAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 1 (Bernama) -- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated tonight that the issue of Approved Permits (APs) for car imports was about Proton, and unrelated to his relationship with International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

"I always said this is not a matter between me and the minister, it's about Proton and AP," he said in response to a question on the emotional encounter between him and Rafidah after the Merdeka Day parade in Putrajaya yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was approached by reporters before he opened an art exhibition entitled "A Beautiful Mind -- The Great Exhibition" which depicted his thoughts in art form at the Tangsi Gallery here. Also present was his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali.

Asked why Rafidah wept when she hugged him at their encounter, he said: "I don't know. How should I know? You all (reporters) should ask her."

Their short but dramatic encounter was the first meeting between Rafidah and Dr Mahathir, who is advisor to Proton, following their public spat over the issuance of APs which Dr Mahathir claimed had eroded the competitiveness of the national car maker.

Dr Mahathir also asked for the list of AP holders to be made public.

Rafidah responded then that disclosing the names had never been government policy but she revealed that one of his sons was a recipient of APs.

Many parties urged Rafidah to apologise to Dr Mahathir for making what they felt were hurtful and disrespectful remarks against him.

At the Umno General Assembly last July, Rafidah came under fire from the delegates over her handling of the AP issue.

Asked earlier today why she cried when she met Dr Mahathir yesterday, Rafidah said she felt very close to him.

She said such feelings were normal when a person was close to someone.

"Why did I cry? Well, I told you ... I always felt myself very close to Tun (Mahathir).

Dr Mahathir, when asked what he told Rafidah when she cried while giving him a hug, said he told her "it's okay, it's okay, it's okay".

"When you see someone crying, you would say OK...OK".

"When she hugged me, everybody saw, I didn't say much to her," he said.

He said Rafidah did not apologise to him during their encounter.

Dr Mahathir added that the AP issue needed to be resolved quickly to prevent losses to the government.

-- BERNAMA

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