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RAFIDAH-IRONLADY

RAFIDAH BACK IN "IRON LADY" MODE

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 20 (Bernama) -- A day after breaking down in tears before the full glare of the media, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz was back in her "Iron Lady" mode as she shot down notions she will resign from the Cabinet as a result of the controversy surrounding the issuance of Approved Permits (APs).

The fiesty International Trade and Industry Minister showed no signs of being under pressure as she fielded questions from reporters after delivering her keynote address at the UMNO Wanita General Assembly, here today.

On the contrary, 61-year old Rafidah maintained a jovial countenance, peppering her remarks with jokes and smiles throughout the 15-minute press conference held at the PWTC, again to a full turnout from the media.

"I am not stressed, you are only stressed if you are in the wrong, you are only stressed if what you do is not right. For me, what I am saying is right. What I am doing is right.

"Why should I feel stressed?" she said.

Yesterday, Rafidah broke down during a press conference while reading aloud excerpts of a letter explaining the AP issue sent to former Prime Minister and Proton adviser Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The controversy erupted when Dr Mahathir said the issuance of a large number of these permits had led to unfair competition against the national car; that many importers were under-declaring prices and selling cars at a price that was lower than the actual price; and questioned how 20 companies were given the bulk of more than 50,000 APs when the government's aim was to assist as many Bumiputera businessmen as possible by spreading out the issuance of APs.

Following this, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi asked Rafidah recently to reply all the points raised by Dr Mahathir, which the minister did before she went on leave abroad.

Abdullah had also informed Rafidah then of the need to release the names of those who received APs to stop speculation that these permits were being abused.

On Monday evening, the Prime Minister's Office released the names AP recipients and the allocation for this year.

It revealed that Tan Sri Nasimuddin SM Amin Nasimuddin, the managing director of the Naza Motor Group, and Datuk Seri Syed Azman Syed Ibrahim and Datuk Mohd Haniff Abd Aziz as being major recipients of APs through several companies.

But Rafidah was clearly incensed over questions on rumours of her stepping down from the Cabinet over the APs issue.

"This is a very stupid story. I don't want to comment about that. Why (did) you highlight it? You all like to see me step down? If you don't, then don't ask this question. Those people (the rumour-mongers) are detractors, so don't," she said.

Rafidah, one of the country's longest serving ministers having joined the Cabinet in 1980 as Public Enterprises Minister, said those who were keen to see her leave the Cabinet should ask the Prime Minister about it.

"You ask the Prime Minister lah. It is not any minister's prerogative. If anybody is very concerned about (me) resigning, ask the Prime Minister, he has the power, I am appointed. There's no point asking me," she said.

Rafidah also wondered aloud on the possibility that somebody would like

to see her go.

"Maybe somebody wants me to step down, (maybe) they want to replace me," she said.

Rafidah was appointed by Tun Dr Mahathir as Minister of Trade and Industry in 1987 replacing Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. -- BERNAMA

WNZ/MAM/JM MR