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RAFIDAH-CRY

RAFIDAH BREAKS DOWN OVER SUGGESTIONS SHE WAS RUDE TO DR MAHATHIR

By: Wan Nurzila Abdul Rahman

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz broke down today when describing her relationship with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, which she said, had been totally misconstrued by the general public following the controversy over Approved Permits (APs).

Describing her bond with the former Prime Minister as that of a "father and daughter," Rafidah said she was sad over suggestions that she had been rude to Dr Mahathir.

"It's like a 'father' and 'daughter' (relationship), the 'father' said something that is not correct, so the 'daughter' should correct them. I think that should be the spirit, it's me, the 'daughter' explaining things to her 'father'," she said.

The 61 year-old Wanita UMNO chief said she had written a letter to Dr Mahathir because the issue involving APs was "so extensive."

Admitting to having a soft spot for Dr Mahathir, Rafidah said she even ended the letter by wishing Dr Mahathir and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah, well.

In reading the letter out loud, she said, "I even ended my letter (to Dr Mahathir) with this, 'Sekianlah dan saya mengambil kesempatan ini untuk mengucapkan selamat menyambut ulang tahun yang ke-80 kepada Yang Amat Berhormat Tun dan mendoakan semoga YAB Tun dan Siti Hasmah sentiasa berada dalam keadaan sihat dan sejahtera. (I take this opportunity to wish Yang Amat Berhormat Tun 'a Happy 80th Birthday' and pray that YAB Tun and (Tun Dr) Siti Hasmah will always be well and in good health."

At this juncture, Rafidah broke down almost uncontrollably on the 38th floor of the UMNO headquarters at the Putra World Trade Centre here during a media briefing after chairing a Wanita UMNO Exco meeting.

Speaking in between sobs, Rafidah also questioned how could some people suggest that she was rude to Dr Mahathir as she was just performing her duty in explaining the truth to him.

"I want to tell you this, I don't give him birthday gifts, never," she said.

Rafidah said, "My present to him always is my doa (prayers). My doa to God that Tun will always be in good health and that he will always be under Allah's protection (sentiasa dilindungi Allah)."

"(There have been) Some misconceptions are that I am rude to Tun. My God, far from it! I cannot possibly be rude to Tun, I regard him as a father figure, but this is not about relationship, this is about fact and figures that have to be corrected, please don't misconstrue," she said when referring to the AP issue.

"For anybody to suggest that I am being rude to Tun, you are wrong, you are completely wrong. Please separate the policy from the personal relationship," she pleaded.

Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin yesterday called on Rafidah to apologise openly to Dr Mahathir for her "disconcerting" statements on APs and that her reply to the former prime minister should have been done in a more respectful manner.

"Do you remember that I was the first to scream when he (Dr Mahathir) wanted to leave...until my shoes came off?," she said when recalling the occasion when Dr Mahathir announced his intention to resign as prime minister at the 2002 UMNO General Assembly here.

Rafidah said lack of understanding following the AP controversy as well as with her relations with Dr Mahathir had put her in bad light.

"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," she said.

Asking those present at the briefing to look at the issue objectively as all she wanted to do "was to clear the air."

"I feel very sad when anybody brings on the relationship issue. Please, help me in this, the relationship with Tun. Don't touch it. I have been with him for so long already," she said.

Rafidah joined the Cabinet in 1980 as Minister of Public Enterprises when Dr Mahathir was then the Deputy Prime Minister. Dr Mahathir appointed Minister of Trade and Industry in May 1987 taking over from Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

When asked on her relationship with Dr Mahathir, Rafidah said, "I am sure I am still close to Tun, it doesn't change at all because this is about clearing an issue."

Rafidah said she was worried that Dr Mahathir was given the wrong facts and figures regarding the AP issue.

"I think it is important that Tun be told that some of the facts he had been probably told by others (that are not correct). This is my worry. I hope that nobody has been telling that because Tun wouldn't know unless somebody told him.

"He has been told the wrong thing and he thinks that's the truth, not only is he making me sad, he should not go round with that kind of misconception.

"Now, I am doing my duty to tell Tun the truth. I have to do that because this is about government policies and it not something that we argue about, I would like Tun to know the facts."

Rafidah also said that she was prepared to meet Dr Mahathir anytime if the latter needs more explanation on the issue.

"He is not here, we cannot meet now, only when he comes back, I am prepared to see him, no problem," she said adding that she was not able to meet Dr Mahathir because the "decision to write the letter came abruptly, just two days."

She said the Cabinet told her to write "and I have no choice, I had to do it on Friday itself before leaving (for a holiday abroad). I made sure Tun received (the letter)."

Dr Mahathir now is abroad.

When asked on Zainuddin's suggestion for her to apologise to Dr Mahathir, Rafidah said it was not a question of who was doing wrong to whom.

"I do not why Zam is talking like that said like that. Actually, I have not wronged anybody, Tun also did not say anything about me. Tun only brought up several issues for which I have replied in an honourable manner in the letter." ("Saya tak tahu kenapa Zam cakap macam tu, sebenarnya saya tidak bersalah dengan sesiapa, bahkan Tun pun bukan mengata saya apa-apa. Tun hanya menyatakan beberapa perkara yang saya telah beri jawapan secara terhormat dalam surat kepada Tun.")

"I hope no one perceives me as having wronged anybody. These are facts," she said. she said. ("Saya harap janganlah pulak sesiapa menganggap saya berbuat salah kepada sesiapa, tak ada. Ini soal fakta").

She also asked the media to not create an impression that she had a row with Dr Mahathir.

"Do not create an impression that I have quarrelled with Tun as when one has said something that is not right, we have to clarify. And as a matter of fact, I wrote to Tun as I did not want the media to play up the issue," Rafidah told the reporters present. ("Jangan create impression seolah-olah

saya ni bertelingkah dengan Tun, pasal bila seseorang berkata sesuatu maka kalau tak betul kita jawab lah, dan secara kebetulan saya beri secara bertulis kepada Tun kerana saya tidak hendak media main-mainkan.").

Earlier on when speaking on the AP issue, she pointed to the Quran in front of her and said, "I am holding the Quran, ok? I am not joking about this, I am not a hypocrite. I stand by God, you know," said Rafidah. ("Saya pegang Quran ok?. Saya tak reti cakap main-main, hipokrit tak mahu. I stand by God, you know.").

In an interview with the New Straits Times yesterday, Rafidah was asked whether she had apologised in her letter to Dr Mahathir.

She replied, "Why should I? This is not a letter of apology. There is nothing to apologise for."

Asked whether she would meet Dr Mahathir after having sent the letter, she replied there was no need to.

"Even as a Cabinet minister (when Dr Mahathir was the prime minister), I hardly ever saw him. Months would pass before I actually saw him," she said in the interview. -- BERNAMA

WNZ MR SHY