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RAFIDAH-AP

RAFIDAH SILENT ON DR MAHATHIR'S ALLEGATION

By: Salbiah Said

PRETORIA, (South Africa) July 27 (Bernama) -- International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz has kept mum over Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's allegation that she had misled the Umno General Assembly over the Approved Permit (AP) issue.

"God is my witness," she told Malaysian journalists at Sheraton Hotel lobby, here, before heading for Johannesburg for a Malaysia-South Africa Business Forum Wednesday.

When pressed further, she said: Ask Pak Lah (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi), as she alighted from her car.

Since yesterday, Rafidah who is accompanying Abdullah on a three-day official visit to South Africa, has been evading the Malaysian media, who had been hounding her on the issue.

Rafidah had yesterday declined comment after the joint press conference between Abdullah and South African President Thabo Mbeki.

All she said to reporters was: "I am in South Africa. I'm not going to say anything on the AP issue."

But her mood changed when she and other Cabinet Ministers accompanied the Prime Minister for a visit to South Africa's Freedom Park.

Rafidah, in her winding-up speech as Umno Wanita Head at the party's 56th General Assembly last Saturday, tried to explain at length the issuance of the APs but was heckled by delegates who clearly were not satisfied with her explanation.

There were those who wanted Rafidah to apologise to Dr Mahathir as they felt that she was rude to the former Prime Minister during their spat through the media over the AP controversy.

Last Tuesday, 61-year old Rafidah broke down almost uncontrollably at a press conference over suggestions she was rude to Dr Mahathir.

She said she regarded Dr Mahathir, who stepped down on Oct 31, 2003, after 21 years as Malaysia's Prime Minister, as a father figure.

Yesterday Rafidah appeared to be in high spirits, enjoying her retreat at the park but still kept her distance from the media.

Meanwhile, Abdullah had earlier declined comment on Proton board's decision not to renew the contract of its chief executive officer (CEO) Tengku Mahaleel Tengku Ariff.

Tengku Mahaleel is on leave effective July 26 prior to his retirement on Sept 30.

Proton had appointed Datuk Kisai Rahmat, currently director of operations, and Datuk Kamarulzaman Darus, currently CEO of Proton Tanjung Malim Sdn Bhd, as joint chief operating officers to run Proton Holdings. --

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