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Abdullah-Rafidah

RAFIDAH TOLD TO REPLY TO DR MAHATHIR, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 7 (Bernama) -- The Cabinet at its meeting yesterday has directed Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz to write a letter to former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad replying to all the issues raised pertaining to the government's automotive policy by the Proton advisor.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told reporters here today that the Minister of International Trade and Industry "had to reply because the issues concerned her ministry."

Among the issues raised by Dr Mahathir was the concentration of Approved Permits (AP) on only a few companies, the government's auto policy as well as the entry of foreign cars at very low prices which reduced the national car's competitiveness.

Dr Mahathir had said this at a press conference called last Tuesday where he defended Proton Chief Executive Officer Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff's outburst and criticism of the government's auto policy in an interview the latter gave to Oriental Daily, a Chinese language newspaper.

Responding to questions from reporters after officiating the International Conference on Knowledge Management here, Abdullah, who is also Finance Minister, said the government's decision not to reveal the names of AP holders remains unchanged.

Dr Mahathir in previous comments had asked for the list of AP recipients to be revealed.

When approached yesterday outside her office, Rafidah declined to comment.

As to whether the Cabinet asked Rafidah to explain how only 20 companies were issued with 54,000 APs, Abdullah said..."she was asked a lot of things. She will prepare and provide information for the Cabinet."

Dr Mahathir had claimed that out of the 67,000 APs issued last year, only 12,600 were given to 82 companies while the bulk of 54,000 APs were given to 20 companies.

In responding to further questions, Abdullah also said the national car "Proton is our car, we want it to succeed. Yes, we have been protecting Proton (but) while we reduce protection gradually, Proton must develop its competitiveness."

The Prime Minister also said the government has yet to make its decision on the new national auto policy as it needed to further study the matter.

"The decision on the matter would be made at a future Cabinet meeting, Abdullah said, but declined to disclose the details of the policy which was submitted to the Cabinet yesterday.

After a delay by the government in announcing the new policy in June, Rafidah said recently the auto policy would be unveiled by the Ministry of Finance in September.

Turning to skyrocketing oil prices, the Prime Minister said the Cabinet also discussed the increase in oil prices in the world market which currently were hovering at record levels of US\$61 per barrel. -- BERNAMA

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