

Dr M: AP list incomplete

'Release lists from previous years, too'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not satisfied with the released Approved Permit (AP) list for imported cars, saying it is "incomplete".

He called for the 2004 AP list and that of previous years to be made public, too.

"People should know the whole truth and nothing but the truth," the former prime minister, who returned from an overseas holiday on Sunday, told a press conference at the Petronas Twin Towers here.

Dr Mahathir said International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz made a number of claims on the AP issue at the Umno general assembly which were "not correct".

He also said it was not true that the issuance of APs had increased the number of bumiputras in the automotive industry, "especially when two or three people who had no showrooms got thousands of APs."

He questioned why former officers of the ministry who were not automotive businessmen and who had no facilities to assemble or sell the imported cars received thousands of APs.

Dr Mahathir, who issued a press statement on the AP issue, wanted to know why only the AP list for 2005 was released.

"Once you have released, release everything because people may feel suspicious. I like people to think that the Government is transparent as promised, and will give all figures.

"When I was prime minister, and I was accused of giving contracts to cronies, I took out the whole pile showing all the contracts and put that out without amendments," he remarked.

Dr Mahathir also questioned the basis of determining the number of APs issued.

Reiterating that he was not happy with the AP issue, he said the fact was that more foreign cars were being imported more easily into the country.

He pointed out that Rafidah's ministry gave varying figures on the total number of APs issued.

"It is said to be 67,000. then 50,000, then 45,000. These are statements from Miti (Ministry of International Trade and Industry). Apparently, they are not very sure themselves," he said.

On July 18, the Government released the list for open and franchise APs for imported cars for 2005.

This year alone, 67,000 APs have been approved, and of this number more than 28,000 went



DISSATISFIED: Dr Mahathir speaking his mind during a press conference at the Petronas Twin Towers yesterday.

What Dr M said about AP issue and Rafidah

Once you have released, release everything because people may feel suspicious. I like people to think that the Government is transparent as promised, and will give all figures.

When I was prime minister, and I was accused of giving contracts to cronies, I took out the whole pile, showing all the contracts and put that out without amendments.

I regard all the ladies in this country as my daughters. I am old enough to be their father.

to four people - Tan Sri Nasimuddin S.M. Amin. Datuk Syed Azman Syed Ibrahim. Datuk Mohd Haniff Abdul Aziz and Datuk Azzuddin Ahmad.

Dr Mahathir confirmed that he had received a letter from Rafidah on the AP list, along with her birthday wishes to him on his 80th birthday.

"The names of the companies were not given in full. How many people were shareholders in how many companies? How many APs were given? Many things were not revealed to me," he said.

He added that he would make public the letters he had written to Rafidah and the reply he got, stating that copies would also be sent to all Umno delegates.

During his tenure as prime minister. Dr Mahathir said there was never a government resolution not to reveal the names of the people who benefited from government policies.

On calls for Rafidah to apologise to him for purportedly being rude to him, he said: "I am not interested in whether people are rude to me, apologise to me or not. I am interested in knowing the truth ... that



I won't be discriminatory and say you are not my daughter. I love all the women in this country and I want to do something for them.

It is not true that giving out so many APs had increased the number of bumiputras in the car business, especially when only two or three people who have no showrooms have received thousands of APs.

I also have a lot of people who say very nice things about me and decide to fight against me. Then they lost against me. But I bear no grudge.

is all because this (APs) has an effect on the national industry and economy."

On whether he regarded Rafidah as a daughter, Dr Mahathir said: "I regard all the ladies in this country as my daughters. I am old enough to be their father."

At a press conference last week. Rafidah broke down, saying that it hurt that people accused her of being rude to Dr Mahathir, whom she regarded as a father figure.

Dr Mahathir said many people came to him and said he was like a father to them.

"I also have a lot of people who say very nice things about me and decide to fight against me.

"Then they lost against me. But I bear no grudge. Many of those people I brought back into the Cabinet, as you know. These people go against me and I still bring them back into the Cabinet and push them up," he added.

Asked whether he had any regrets on this, he said he had none because "that's politics".

• Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's response to issues raised in the letter by Rafidah Aziz - Page 4

Rafidah's response

"No, no, I am in South Africa. No, please dont ask me."

— Rafidah's reaction when asked if she had heard of Tun Dr Mahathir's statement

She is currently accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on his visit to South Africa.

Dr M speaks on Proton and APs

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's response to issues raised in the letter by Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz to him and at the just-concluded Umno general assembly.

I WANT to make this explanation because newspapers and TV cannot possibly report all the facts to the public.

The Proton issue is not about differences in statements made by individuals or a quarrel between a minister and a retiree. It is about a national industry. At a time when many car companies have gone bankrupt and closed shop, Proton is still alive and healthy.

It has more than RM2bil in cash and does not depend on the Government or banks for the more than the RM2bil it paid for its new Tanjung Malim plant. Surely this success has at least a little to do with efficient management, especially considering the impact of so many foreign cars being imported at such low prices.

APs (Approved Permits) were first introduced in the 1970s before the existence of Proton.

At that time, not many Malays could enter the automotive business because the agents for Kah Motors (Honda), UMW (Toyota) and Cycle and Carriage (Mercedes-Benz) and others were non-bumiputras. They refused to give bumiputra businessmen a chance.

Cars assembled in the country or imported by agents, dealers or official importers could not be imported by anyone else without paying a commission to the official agent.

Therefore, APs were given to import second cars. Although many bumiputras sold their APs, there were some who succeeded in this business. Among them is Tan Sri Nasimuddin S.M. Amin. Without APs and Proton, there would not have been any bumiputra automotive businessmen.

When Proton started, many

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bumiputras successfully became Proton agents to sell its cars.

Proton production has successfully reduced the import of foreign cars by non-bumiputra agents. Of course, if there was higher demand for Proton cars, there would be even more bumiputra agents and the cars would be selling like hotcakes.

On the other hand, if so many APs are given to a small number of bumiputras, and they make no preparations whatsoever to do business, then of course the number of bumiputra automotive businessmen will not increase and Proton sales by its agents, who are mostly bumiputras, too, will not sell so well.

It is clear that the giving of APs had only benefited a handful of bumiputras, caused losses to Proton agents, especially the bumiputras, and reduced the opportunity of other bumiputras to become Proton car dealers.

It is not true that giving out so many APs had increased the number of bumiputras in the car business, especially when only two or three people who have no showrooms have received thousands of APs.

In the past, open APs enabled the holder to import many car brands. When the franchise APs were introduced, the franchise holder could only import a par-

ticular car brand.

Those who in the past could bring in those cars through the open APs now can no longer import those cars. The ones who got the franchise APs are not automotive businessmen but former ministry officials.

They got thousands of APs although they did not have facilities to assemble or sell these cars. They only surrendered this (for a price) to others who had the capability to assemble and sell those cars.

The question of the quality of Proton does not arise because Proton has succeeded in penetrating sophisticated markets like Britain and Australia.

Even so, new models might still have some flaws. But even thousands of known car brands have been withdrawn. This includes Mitsubishi, Chevrolet, Ford and other brands.

This explanation is done for the sake of the country's dignity and interest and a national industry that has been a success. I do not hold any interest in Proton. As Proton adviser, I do not get paid even a sen. If my son received some APs (95 APs) to bring in Porsche, it was after fulfilling the conditions. To sell 50 of those cars is not easy. Please do not drag my family into this like before, when

something that should not be done had been done.

I have to make a revelation in full because of the national interest of the industry, not because I did not get APs as alleged by a writer in an English newspaper.

I received the letter of explanation from the International Trade and Industry Minister. I find the contents of the letter and the annexes did not substantiate the claims the minister made:

- APPROVAL for Naza Ria to become a national car;
- THE number of APs that were issued from 2004-2005;
- THE basis and conditions for the issuing of APs;
- THE types of APs issued; and
- THE names of those (whether company or individuals) who received APs and the number of APs they received.

In the Umno general assembly, the minister made several claims that were not correct. During a television interview, she also alleged that I had forgotten this and that. Although I am already 80 years old, I am not senile yet.

Initially, after replying to the minister's letter with a copy sent to the Cabinet, I had not intended to make any more

statements. It was up to the Cabinet to decide what was the truth and what was not.

However, because the minister did not make statements that were true to the Umno delegates and the public. I feel compelled to give an explanation.

When I was prime minister, there was no decision by the Government to not make public the names of AP holders. Maybe the present government had made this decision (not to make it public).

The question is whether this decision was made before or after the minister made the statement that it was government policy not to reveal the names of AP holders.

I was once trade and industry minister. The minister's explanation that there were many who were given APs without fulfilling the conditions when she took over as minister, and that her move to cancel the APs which were issued to them showed how strict she was. Who was the trade and industry minister before the current minister? If one did not mention it, one may think it was me.

Although there is no official prohibition against government officers who had just retired (by option) from being given special opportunities by

the Government, there are however questions why these former officers who did not fulfil conditions were given thousands of APs.

We know many automotive businessmen, including members of the Malay Car Importers and Dealers Association of Malaysia (Pekema), had applied for APs but were not given any.

They were also not told about the franchise AP category, which would have enabled them to be given many APs. There was no widespread awareness on franchise APs among car businessmen.

This category was suddenly introduced and only certain people received many APs in this category. And AP holders who had earlier imported franchise brands were no longer allowed to import those brands.

I am not envious of rich Malays but their wealth must be obtained through correct means. I have often told off those who had sold their APs to become rich quickly. It is obvious that the sale of APs is widespread now. It is the responsibility of the minister to monitor the situation to ensure foul play does not occur.

A detailed explanation on the correspondence among the various parties will follow.