

Mahathir downplays AP issue at trade talk

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad could not resist making a reference to the issue of the day - the Approved Permit (AP) for imported cars - during a luncheon talk.

"Malaysia has a good government. Very considerate. Off and on, APs are given to the wrong people but these are minor things," he said.

His remarks drew good-hearted laughter from the audience at The 3rd Asia Economic Summit who were there to hear the former prime minister speak on *Malaysia in Asia - Challenges, Responses and Opportunities*.

The Government released the 2005 AP list on July 18, after Dr Mahathir repeatedly called for it to be made public.

And when the former Umno president said it was incomplete and alleged that International Trade and

Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz had made claims during the Umno general assembly that were "not correct", the Government released another list on Wednesday, that of the 2004 AP holders.

Yesterday, when met by reporters at the end of his luncheon talk, Dr Mahathir declined to comment.

When reporters asked if he was happy that the new list was released, he closed his ears pretending he did not hear the question and walked towards his car.

Asked whether he was going to have another press conference soon, Dr Mahathir quipped: "When I have a press conference, you ask me at the press conference why I have one."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when met by reporters upon his return from South Africa at the TUDM base in Subang, said he had "nothing more to add" about the issue for now.

During the talk earlier, Dr Mahathir said countries in Asia should not fear an economically powerful China because it had no colonial or militaristic ambitions.

Asia, he added, should instead welcome a prosperous China and see this as an opportunity to benefit from a bigger market.

"We are already benefiting. We are getting more Chinese tourists and they are already buying a lot of things from us," he said.

"I'm not afraid of China becoming big. As it is, I worry about people who think they have the right to regime-change and (do) pre-emptive attacks and things like that," he added.

On Myanmar, Dr Mahathir said the fact that it had given up its chairmanship of Asean showed that it was "sensitive to the thinking of people."

He also said one needed to persuade Myanmar to accept democracy "bit by bit".



Mahathir: Closed his ears and pretended not to hear reporters' questions on the AP issue