

MAHATHIR-PROTON

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SHAH ALAM, AUG. 2 (BERNAMA)-- PROTON SAGA; THE MALAYSIAN CAR, WILL INITIALLY BE PRODUCED FOR THE LOCAL MARKET, WITH EXPORTS MADE ONLY AFTER THREE TO FIVE YEARS OF PRODUCTION, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID PERUSAHAAN OTOMOBIL MALAYSIA (PROTON) WOULD NOT BE IN A POSITION TO MEET OVERSEAS ORDERS FOR THE CAR UNTIL IT COULD OVERCOME THE INITIAL TEETHING PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF A GOOD BACK-UP SERVICE.

BUT THIS DID NOT MEAN THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PRECLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPORTING THE CAR WHICH WAS SCHEDULED TO ROLL OFF THE ASSEMBLY LINE IN JULY NEXT YEAR, HE TOLD REPORTERS AFTER HIS FIRST VISIT TO THE PROTON ASSEMBLY PLANT IN PUCHONG NEAR HERE.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT STUDIES ON THE POTENTIAL MARKETS, THE BACK-UP SYSTEM, INCLUDING ENOUGH SPARE PARTS FOR CUSTOMERS, THE AGREEMENTS FOR THE ORDERS AND THE MODE OF PAYMENTS WOULD FIRST HAVE TO BE CARRIED OUT BEFORE THE CAR COULD BE DELIVERED TO OVERSEAS MARKETS.

+ IT'S NOT GOING TO BE A ONE-TIME THING WHERE YOU PACK THE CAR AND EXPORT IT JUST LIKE THAT.

+ WE MUST HAVE A GOOD BACK-UP SYSTEM WHICH, I THINK WILL TAKE A LONG TIME, AND MAYBE IT WOULD BE THE NEXT THREE TO FIVE YEARS BEFORE WE START EXPORTING OUR CAR;+ HE ADDED.---MORE

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DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR NOTED WITH INTEREST THE TRADE ENQUIRIES ON THE PROTON SAGA WHICH HAD BEEN RECEIVED FROM FIRMS OVERSEAS, INCLUDING A WELL-KNOWN BRITISH MOTOR COMPANY WHICH INDICATED IT WANTED TO BUY 40,000 UNITS A YEAR FOR A START.

BESIDES THE BRITISH COMPANY, WHICH HAS ABOUT 100 OUTLETS, AUSTRIA AND SEVERAL ASEAN COUNTRIES HAD ALSO SHOWN KEEN INTEREST IN THE MALAYSIAN CAR, A BRAINCHILD OF THE PRIME MINISTER.

ORDERS HAD ALSO BEEN RECEIVED FROM MALAYSIANS BUT DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THE CAR WAS NOT OPEN FOR BOOKINGS YET.

HEAVY INDUSTRIES CORPORATION OF MALAYSIA (HICOM) CHAIRMAN TAN SRI JAMIL JAN SAID 12 PROTOTYPES OF THE PROTON SAGA HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO VIGOROUS TESTS IN JAPAN.

HE EXPLAINED THAT IT WAS A NORMAL PROCESS FOR CARS TO BE TESTED BEFORE THEY WERE ASSEMBLED.--MORE

MAHATHIR-PROTON 3 SHAH ALAM

DURING THE TWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR VISIT, THE PRIME MINISTER WAS GIVEN A CLOSE-DOOR BRIEFING BY TAN SRI JAMIL AND TOURED THE PLANT SITE.

A TOTAL OF \$120 MILLION HAD BEEN SPENT SO FAR ON THE \$560 MILLION PLANT WHICH WAS 60 PER CENT COMPLETED.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK DONE AT THE PLANT.

HE SAID IT WAS ON SCHEDULE AND THE QUALITY OF WORK WAS GOOD.

BECAUSE OF THE ANTICIPATED TEETHING PROBLEMS, ONLY 5,500 UNITS WOULD BE PRODUCED IN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF PRODUCTION.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, 38,000 UNITS WOULD ROLL OFF THE PLANT.

THE 1,300CC AND 1,500CC MODELS WOULD BE SOLD FROM SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER NEXT YEAR AFTER THE MARKETING STRATEGY HAD BEEN WORKED OUT.

REGARDING CRITICISMS ON THE MALAYSIAN CAR PROJECT, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SHRUGGED IT OFF AS +ANOTHER ONE IN THE LIST OF MANY AGAINST WHATEVER THAT WAS DONE BY THE GOVERNMENT.+ -- MORE

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THE PRIME MINISTER HIT OUT AT THESE SO-CALLED +LEARNED PEOPLE+ WHO SEEMED TO CRITICIZE ALL THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, INCLUDING THOSE ON THE IMPORT SUBSTITUTION, PALM OIL, HEAVY AND LIGHT INDUSTRIES, FOREIGN INVESTMENTS AND ALSO THE MADE-IN-MALAYSIA TYRE PROJECT.

+IF WE LISTEN TO THEM, WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING AT ALL AND IMAGINE WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THERE WERE NO INDUSTRIES IN THIS COUNTRY JUST BECAUSE WE LISTEN TO THEM.

+SOME WERE EVEN SUGGESTING THAT THE NATION SHOULD NOT BE INDEPENDENT AND ARE WE TO LISTEN TO THEM?+ HE ASKED.-- BERNAMA