

KUALA LUMPUR, MARCH 2 (BERNAMA) -- A MADE-IN-MALAYSIA SPORTS CAR AFFORDABLE BY MALAYSIANS IS ON THE DRAWING BOARD AND WILL BE OUT IN THE MARKET, POSSIBLY IN TWO YEARS.

PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY CONSULTATIONS HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT WITH A EUROPEAN CAR FIRM TO LOOK INTO THE DESIGN OF THE CAR.

HE DECLINED TO IDENTIFY THE EUROPEAN COMPANY, SAYING THAT IT WAS NOT ITALIAN AS WAS REPORTED BY A LOCAL NEWSPAPER TODAY.

+THE CAR WILL NOT BE IN THE MASERATI OR THE FERRARI CLASS AS THAT WILL BE TOO EXPENSIVE. BUT IT WILL BE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE PROTON SAGA AND OTHER ORDINARY CARS.

+THE BEAUTY OF IT IS THAT IT WILL BE WITHIN THE BUDGET OF MALAYSIANS,+ HE SAID AFTER SPEAKING WITH PRESIDENT SUHARTO OVER THE TELEPHONE TO INAUGURATE A NEW SUBMARINE CABLE BETWEEN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA AT HIS OFFICE HERE.

+WE HAVE BEEN TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF HAVING A LOCALLY-MADE SPORTS CAR SINCE THREE YEARS AGO AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSEMBLING OF THE CAR IS EXPECTED TO TAKE TWO YEARS AT THE VERY LEAST,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE SPORTS CAR WOULD HAVE A BASIC CHASSIS SIMILAR TO THE PROTON SAGA BUT THE DESIGN WOULD BE DIFFERENT.

YESTERDAY, PERUSAHAAN OTOMOBIL NASIONAL (PROTON) UNVEILED THE PROTON SAGA-- A LOOK-ALIKE OF THE MITSUBISHI LANCER FIORE, HAVING A CONTEMPORARY WEDGE-SHAPED STYLING WITH COLOUR-COORDINATED BUMPERS.

THE PRIME MINISTER DESCRIBED THE CAR AS +BEAUTIFUL+ WITH MODERN DESIGN IN KEEPING WITH THE TIMES.

RESPONDING TO CRITICISMS THAT THE CAR DID NOT REFLECT A MALAYSIAN IDENTITY, HE SAID THAT WAS TO BE EXPECTED AS THE DESIGN WAS VERY MUCH INFLUENCED BY THE JAPANESE PARENT COMPANY INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT.

+LOOK AT THE CARS MANUFACTURED IN OTHER COUNTRIES. THEY, TOO, DO NOT REFLECT THEIR NATIONAL IDENTITY.

+JAPANESE CARS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE VERY SIMILAR TO ITALIAN-MADE CARS AND IN FACT MOST CARS LOOK VERY ITALIAN AS ITALY IS RECOGNIZED AS MORE ADVANCED IN CAR DESIGNING,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ALSO SAID MALAYSIA, FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, HAD TO HAVE A COMPACT CAR DESIGNED TO SUIT MALAYSIAN ROADS AND OTHER LOCAL CONDITIONS.

MALAYSIA, HE SAID, COULD NOT COPY AMERICAN-DESIGNED CARS WHICH WERE MOSTLY LARGE TO SUIT THE HIGHWAYS AND TO MEET LONG-DISTANCE TRAVEL REQUIREMENTS THERE. --BERNAMA

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