

PM: Sophisticated technology not beyond

# Proof of Malaysian

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By Ahmad A. Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight launched the new model of the national car — the Proton Wira — describing it as a success and proof that Malaysia is capable of penetrating the sophisticated automotive industry.

He said the new model was also proof of the country's ability to move into sophisticated technology through the process of careful planning, research and development, and engineering expertise from the local workforce at Proton.

At the launching at the Putra World Trade Centre here, Dr Mahathir said the new model was the result of a lot of hard work initiated 4½ years ago. The launch was carried live over RTM and TV3.

He said the Proton Wira was more aerodynamic and had modern characteristics. It was also more sophisticated and equipped with additional safety features for passengers.

"I am sure the Proton Wira is top value for money and will be viewed favourably internationally among cars of similar class."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was happy that the national car had achieved much success.

Currently, over 100 companies were involved in the manufacture and supply of more than 1,200 components of the car, he said, adding that the local content in the car had gone up to 80 per cent.

The introduction of the new model would also silence critics who doubted the ability of Malaysians to acquire skills associated with high technology, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Proton Wira was the product of Malaysian creativity, research and effort. "This

means that part of the Government's objective to increase local capability in engineering, including production engineering, has been achieved.

"But Proton needs to intensify its research and development efforts to ensure that the national car's performance remains competitive in the international market.

"Proton also needs to continue to make cosmetic changes to its models, and when necessary, create new ones to provide satisfaction to customers whose tastes are always changing.

"Proton's international success is well-known, especially after winning six gold awards in the United Kingdom. In the effort to enter new markets, the introduction of a left-hand drive model could be of some help."

Dr Mahathir said the success of any business enterprise depended on its after sales service. Customer confidence in any product would partly depend on this, together with relevant advice, guidance and repairs when needed.

"In the automotive industry, after-sales service is very important. In this regard, the national car's major distributor, Edaran Otomobil Nasional (EON), must ensure reliable and good after sales service."

There are now more than 400,000 Proton cars on the road. The Prime Minister said this opened a new possibility for the motor trade — that of reconditioned cars.

He said the birth of the reconditioned car industry would not only make cars retain their quality, but create the possibility of an export market if their prices were reasonable.

He said that although Pro-

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local workforce  
ability

# Auction of three cars the highlight at launch

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ton's production capacity has been increased from 80,000 to 120,000 units a year, the interest shown by some countries which have yet to import the national car, gave hope that an even higher capacity was needed.

"I hope Proton will give serious attention to exports and prepare itself towards this end. With increased volume, not only would economies of scale be realised, the accompanying supportive industry will also grow rapidly.

Malaysia would be able to supply components to the automotive industry in other countries."

At the launch, a glittering ceremony complete with laser lights and models dressed in futuristic costumes, the Proton Wira, namely the 1.5GL manual, 1.5GL automatic and 1.6XLi automatic models, were unveiled by Dr Mahathir.

Guests were also entertained by US group The Platters.

The highlight of the launch was the auction of the three cars, the proceeds of which went to the Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti) for charity.

The highest bidder for the 1.6XLi version was Genting Berhad chairman Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong who paid RM200,000.

The other cars were auctioned to Abdul Ghani Yusof, who is director of Sterling Resources Sdn Bhd, and Johan Foo, the executive director of Rashid Hussein Bhd.

Ghani paid \$150,000 for the 1.5GL automatic while Foo paid \$145,000 for the manual model.

The cheques were received by the Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, who heads Bakti.

The chairman of Proton and EON, Tan Sri Jamil Mohd Jan, in his welcoming speech, said the Proton Wira was a result of the manufacturer's continued efforts and commitment to acquire new technology in the dynamic and highly competitive automotive industry.

"It is through our comprehensive research and development programmes and product and manufacturing excellence, that we are able to develop a new car that is technologically on par, in terms of design and quality, with cars produced by developed nations."

He said it was competitively priced to ensure it was within the reach of all Malaysians.

Describing the national car as a runaway success, Jamil said it was a matter of pride that it was comparable in quality with other international makes.

"This is reflected in its success in clinching six awards at international shows."

He added that the new car possessed good safety features, was spacious and aerodynamic, adding that it was environment friendly and had avoided the use of asbestos while use of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) was minimal.

Also present were Mitsubishi Motors Corporation president Dr H. Nakamura and Proton managing director Mr Mitsuo Hattori.