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PROTON TO LAUNCH TOP SELLING MODEL IN CROATIA

ZAGREB, April 15 (Bernama) -- Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) will launch its top selling model, the Proton 400 series, here on Thursday, making Croatia its 31st export market.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will officiate the launching ceremony at the Malaysian Products Exhibition '96 at the Zagreb Spring Fair from tomorrow until Saturday.

Proton's manager of international business Norzahid Mohd Zahudi said the model, currently being offered in western Europe -- Belgium, France and Germany

-- will be distributed by Niva Petrol, part of the Niva Group founded by Nikica Valentinc, a former prime minister of Croatia.

The Niva Group, founded in 1995, has a network of subsidiaries in Croatia, parts of Europe and Asia.

Two variants of the 400 series will be on display, Norzahid said in a statement in response to queries from Bernama recently.

The current line up of the 400 series have been offered in mainland Europe since the beginning of 1995, and this additional market would enable inter-country transfer to take place.

The 400 series comprises the 415 GLSi and 416 GLXi and comes in manual and automatic versions. The models come with four or five doors and a choice of eight colours.

Norzahid said Proton cars had been enjoying encouraging sales in Europe, and was a top selling make in Britain. Proton expects to export up to 30,000 units for the 1996/97 sales period.

Proton exported 116,595 units between 1986 and February 1996, and is now into its 11th year of production.

Proton cars began rolling out of its assembly lines in Shah Alam in 1985.

Norzahid said European countries continued to choose the car as the optimum means of transport because it was suitable for their daily needs.

Dr Mahathir will open the exhibition on Thursday at the Zagreb fair grounds and launch Proton's top selling model for the Croatian market.

Here for a one-day official visit to foster trade ties with Croatia, he was accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Others in the delegation include International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Leo Michael Toyad, Wisma Putra Secretary General Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar and Economic Planning Unit Director General Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman.

Dr Mahathir is also accompanied by a 14-member high-powered business delegation comprising captains of Malaysian industry led by Hicom Bhd chairman Datuk Seri Yahya Ahmad. The business delegation will also attend a briefing by Croatia's ministries of economy, finance, privatisation and property management, maritime affairs, transport and communications.

Dr Mahathir will address a business luncheon and witness the signing of seven instruments of joint ventures and memoranda of understanding between Croatian and Malaysian companies during his visit.

They include the signing of MOUs between the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Malaysia and the Croatian chamber of economy; Pusaka Endau Sdn Bhd and Tvornica Elektricnih Kabeli on technology transfer, and Malaysian Resources Corporation and Niva Holdings D.D. on the setting up of a bank in Croatia.

There will also be an MOU between Exim Bank Malaysia and Niva Petrol for a short-term loan facility and an MOU between South Vest Corporation and Vis-Thanne D.D. for the supply of yarns and grey fabrics.

Agreements will be signed between Kumpulam Pinang Usahasama-Imbas Sdn Bhd, Siemens Electrical Engineering Sdn Bhd and Koncar Power Transformers Ltd for the purchase of power transformers for Tenaga Nasional Bhd. --

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