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Proton-Lotus
PROTON-LOTUS LINK-UP WITH EAST ANGLIA UNIVERSITY

By: Wan A. Hulaimi

NORWICH, Nov 17 (Bernama) -- Proton Malaysia, in conjunction with Lotus car manufacturers, will set up a collaboration programme with the University of East Anglia, here to pioneer a new academic strategy for the training of skilled engineers for the automotive industry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made the announcement here at a press conference after laying the foundation stone for a new Proton engineering facility, the Lotus' Hethel plant near here.

He also lunched with the management and workers at the Lotus factory before planting a tree to commemorate the event at the site of the new Proton engineering and research facility.

Dr Mahathir informed the media that the University of East Anglia, in collaboration with the two car manufacturers, would also set up training facilities in Malaysia to produce graduates with hands-on experience in automotive technology to meet Malaysia's increasing demand for skilled engineering manpower.

"University of East Anglia has a well-established engineering faculty and Lotus has a hands-on training programme. The university and Lotus will help us establish training facilities and schools of engineering in Malaysia.," he said.

This collaboration was among the first tangible results of Proton's recent acquisition of an eighty-percent majority stake in world famous Lotus manufacturing plant.

Besides stepping-up the technical expertise of Proton workers who will benefit from Lotus' acknowledged position in design and automotive engineering and the reputation of East Anglia University's engineering department, the new arrangement will boost Proton's manpower training programme in anticipation of its exponential production increase to some 500,000 cars annually by the end of the century.

The training programme will not only bring Proton workers to the United Kingdom, but will also be conducted in collaboration with our educational institutions in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said.

Explaining Proton's move in buying Lotus, he said that buying into a company which already had a well-established research and development facility was a "logical progression" for Malaysia's national car manufacturer to establish itself as a leader in Asia.

He added that he had visited the Lotus plant about ten years ago when it was seeking foreign investments to develop its Formula 1 car.

When asked if this collaboration with Lotus and Britain meant that there was less dependency on Japanese technology now, he replied: "We have never shut ourselves off from other countries when it comes to technology.

"It was a mistake to say that by looking East we were shutting ourselves off from the West. A lot of people here has the impression of Malaysia as being an appendix of Japan.

"We admit we need technology from Japan because other people would not provide us the technology before."

To another question about Malaysia's investments overseas, he replied that Malaysia's policy was to bring investments to many countries even if "sometimes we step on other people's toes".

This investment in other countries not only brought jobs and employment to other countries, but was also part of Malaysia's strategy to create more markets for its own products, he said.

"We go in to help the countries prosper because when a country prospers the people there will have enough money to buy from Malaysia. When Japan started investing in Malaysia, it created prosperity there so that we could buy their products," he said.

Earlier, during lunch with the management and workers of Lotus, Dr Mahathir told them that he could not hide his delight at the association that had been woven between Proton and Lotus, "a very well-known brand name in the automotive industry."

"Malaysia's association with Lotus is bound to give a lot of prestige and stature not only to Proton but also to Malaysia," Dr Mahathir said.

He went on to explain the concept of Malaysia Incorporated and told them that this philosophy of cooperation between the government and the business sector was adopted when the world was using the name Japan Inc as a derogatory term because it was then thought undesirable that a government should be closely linked with its business and manufacturing community.

"We thought it was not a bad idea for the government to work in cooperation with the private sector. It does not mean that we work just with the people who run the companies and the shareholders.

"We'd like to think that we also work with and for the people working in these companies," he said.

Addressing the Lotus directly, Dr Mahathir told them that the trade unions and workers in Malaysia now agree that this policy had paid off handsomely.

"I am sure this approach we've developed in Malaysia will be introduced here in Lotus, and the culture of excellence in Lotus will be transferred to Malaysia," he said.

Looking at the immediate future, Dr Mahathir told them that production at Lotus would be stepped up even though the type of cars made by Lotus could not be produced for the mass market.

Proton itself was planning to produce from 500,000 to one million cars per year, and the engineering skills of Lotus would improve the cars that Proton would produce. -- BERNAMA

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