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VICTORIAN GOVT LOOKS TO HUSSAIN TO MARKET PROTON NATIONWIDE

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Sept 30 (Bernama) -- The Victorian State Government has approached Malaysian tycoon Dato Dr Mohd Hussain bin Yusuf for his help to have the Proton Australia-wide distributorship, now up for grabs, located in Melbourne.

Inchcape Motors Australia, the distributor of Proton since the Malaysian car's entry into the Australian market in May last year, has decided to relinquish its Proton agency.

Proton is now in the process of engaging a new distributor for its Wira series which has had a chequered history Down Under.

Among the most successful of the 48 Proton dealers in Australia, Hussain is understood to be delighted with the Victorian Government's offer of help to encourage Proton establish its Australian headquarters in Melbourne.

Hussain, who has been active with several multi-million business ventures in Victoria since 1980, including the A\$150 million (RM270 million) leisure and hotel resort development at the beautiful beachside town of Torquey, 70km from Melbourne, and the ownership of Geelong Motors in provincial Geelong, has a high profile among Government leaders and the business community in Australia.

It is believed that Victoria's Minister for Industry, Science and Technology, Mark Birrell wrote to Hussain recently seeking his support to have the Proton headquarters moved from Sydney, where Inchcape is based, to Melbourne, the thriving financial capital of Australia.

Birrell, who is touted as the likely next Premier of Victoria, is keen that Hussain should himself actively participate in the distributorship to ensure Proton's success in Australia.

A State Government source told "Bernama" that Melbourne had many advantages as a distribution centre in the motor industry -- most of the country's automotive manufacturing, including component manufacturing, is located in Melbourne.

He said with a Melbourne base, Proton would easily be able to source automotive components for export to Malaysia thus earning valuable export credits. These could then be used to reduce the duty payable on imported Proton cars to Australia.

Melbourne is also noted as Australia's centre for automotive design where a wide range of design and development work could be carried out on the Proton range. And depending on the circumstances, this work could also be eligible to earn export credits.

It is understood that Hussain is willing to take part in the Proton distributorship -- having promoted the Proton far more than any other dealer in Australia. He has, over the months, used the Australian media and good public relations, to effectively put more Protons on the road here.

The self-effort has cost him thousands of dollars, all done ungrudgingly. "I am doing this for Malaysia and our beloved Prime Minister," he told Bernama early this year.

"I am proud to be a Malaysian and I am proud of the Proton. The Proton is one of the symbols of our achievements as a young nation and all credit should go to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed," he said.

His Proton advertisements in newspapers, television and radio here have all always carried the slogan -- "Proton the Pride of Malaysia".

Many Malaysians living and studying in Australia feel that Hussain's

participation as the distributor of Proton in the highly competitive Australian car market, will lift sales dramatically from the 1,300-odd Wiras sold in the past 18 months in Australia, which is way below the initial target of 4,000 units a year.

The Malaysians say that the good Datuk has the money, influence, experience and expertise to give a much needed boost for Proton in Australia. -- BERNAMA.

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