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Anwar: Proton would not be the success it is if not for Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Proton will not be as successful as it is today without the critical and vital role played by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today.

He said Dr Mahathir's determination and perseverance had ensured the success of the national car project.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir not only mooted the idea of a national car but also became the main force behind it, even going through details of its design.

"He had also urged Cabinet members to use the car so that others will have the confidence (to buy them), and as we know, there were a lot of criticisms against the project then."

Anwar, who told reporters this after attending the annual gathering of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka staff, said he was taking the opportunity "to make some clarifications" to a recent article on Proton's achievement in producing its one millionth car.

He said although other people had played their part and contributed towards the success, those shown by Dr Mahathir were continuous and consistent.

"Thus, I feel the recognition given to Dr Mahathir by Tan Sri Yahya (Tan Sri Yahya Ahmad, Proton's new owner) is appropriate."

However, Anwar said it was incorrect to suggest that the contributions of others to the project were not recognised.

Anwar said: "If we listen carefully to the Prime Minister's speech at the rolling-out ceremony of the one millionth car, it is clear that he had paid tribute and recognised the contributions of the pioneers.

"Yahya has also invited the company's former board of directors, past and present workers. Therefore, to claim that due recognition was not given to these people is not correct."

Asked on the role of Yahya, Anwar said: "He is of course the prime mover of the company now.

"His responsibility is to ensure that it is more efficient, cut costs, increase export capacity and meet the consumer requirements more speedily.

"He is also keeping the Government and the Prime Minister fully informed, besides getting ideas and views from both."

Anwar said it could not be denied that the change in ownership of Proton had brought about several changes.

"We waited for 10 years before the first millionth car was produced. Under the new management, the next million units would be produced in four years. The company will concentrate in the next one or two years on exporting 40 per cent of its output," he added.

Anwar said the Government had confidence in the new management delivering the results, adding the recent acquisition of Lotus Group International by Proton would provide greater impetus in terms of achieving synergy and acquiring skills.

"Normally, we assess the capability of companies which are (privatised) based on their performance after the exercise. This does not mean that the former management was slow or not efficient as they worked on a strong foundation.

"But it is a fact that after the takeover, their capacity and capability have improved more quickly."

He said besides greater efficiency and reduced operation costs, Proton's new management had also continued with the vendor system which has benefited small companies.

Although Anwar did not name the article, it is believed he was referring to the Other Thots column headlined "Proton must be grateful to pioneers" in the New Sunday Times on Jan 5.

In the column, the writer had outlined the development of Proton since the national car project was mooted by Dr Mahathir in the early 1980s.

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