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TECHNOLOGY PARK JOINT VENTURE

By: Wan A Hulaimi

LONDON, June 12 (Bernama) -- A new partnership between Technology Park Malaysia (TPM) and a leading edge research laboratory here will enable Proton cars to be equipped with Malaysian-made integrated sensors and give Malaysia a share of up to 10 percent of the world sensors market now estimated to be worth US$10 billion (RM25 billion) annually, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

Dr Mahathir, who flew in from Gloucester to visit the Central Research Laboratories (CRL) in an industrial park in Hayes, West London, said that this upgrading of Proton cars was necessary to enable it to compete in the car market.

Among those who were here to meet him at CRL were the High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Datuk Kamarudin Abu and chief executive officer of TPM Dr Salleh Ismail.

CRL researchers predict that by the year 2000, each car will be equipped with in excess of 60 individual sensors to control anything from safety air bags to navigational aids.

These high tech additions to Proton cars would increase prices slightly, but the change would be necessary as other car makers would also be equipping their cars with these sophisticated sensors to remain competitive in the marlet, Dr Mahathir said.

"There is no use building cars if you can't sell them," he said.

The Prime Minister, who spent about four hours at the CRL headquarters listening to briefings and looking at new technological innovations, also said that the new joint venture in sensor technology between TPM and CRL (in a company tentatively named Technology Park Malaysia Research Bhd -- TPMR) would also enable Malaysia to introduce tilting trains to run on "our meter-gauge tracks."

He said that improving the railway system was the government's first objective, but changing out metre gauge tracks to the wide gauge would be too expansive.

"The only way we can improve trains in Malaysia is by using tilting trains. We don't have to build the trains ourselves, but we can improve the way they work," he added.

He said that the metre width, which runs throughout the proposed Qunming express, would benefit from the introduction of the tilting train technology.

Before leaving TCR and signing the visitor's book, Dr Mahathir said: "I see CRL as a very important development in technology. The area they are involved in is of interest to us. What I've seen here is impressive in terms of research and development.

I am particularly interested in the philosophy of doing research for others to benefit from. Eventually, there will be a Malaysian version of CLR."

He also met a TCR scientist and Nobel laureate Sir Godfrey Hounsfield who won the award in 1979 for his work on the CAT scanner which revolutionised the way medicine looked at the human brain.

Malaysia's entry into sensor technology research and application follows closely an announcement made by Dr Mahathir at another technology research centre in Farnborough (about 32 miles south West from here) last week, that Tenaga Nasional Bhd would go into the manufacture of electric vehicles by the end of this year.

Explaining the joint venture between TPM and CRL, initially at 51 percent and 49 percent respectively, Dr Salleh said that the formal agreement will be signed before the next Langkawi smart partnership meeting.

TPM had been talking to CRL, which describes itself as a "technology factory" and a "perpetual idea machine", for the last one and half year.

Asked how soon work on the partnership would start, he replied that CRL people would be leaving for Malaysia on Sunday and meet their TPM counterparts on Monday.

Simultaneously, personnel from Sapura, a private Malaysian telecommunications company, would be at CRL here on Monday to start work on another project.

"This is how fast we are moving," he said.

He also said that TPMR already had orders for three million Malaysian-made carbon monoxide sensors for the United States with more to come if the initial order proved satisfactory.

He also said that TPMR would be one of the first Multimedia Super Corridor companies in Malaysia.

On the technology park, Dr Salleh said that they already have 60 companies doing innovation and research there, and the aim is to have 200 Malaysian companies doing areas of research.

Also speaking at the press conference with Dr Salleh, Dr Kenneth Gray, chairman and chief executive of Schipher, CRL's holding company, said that looking at the number of Malaysian engineering and science students in the US and the UK he saw no problems in recruiting research staff for TPMR.

He added: "If I were to look out in a few years time, operation TPMR will absolutely be dominated by Malaysian type products carried out by some of the outstanding scientists that Malaysia generates". -- BERNAMA

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