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DR MAHATHIR LAUNCHES PROTON'S RAPID PROTOTYPING CENTRE

SHAH ALAM, Feb 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd's (Proton) Rapid Prototyping Centre at the national car manufacturing plant here.

The rapid prototyping technology will aid Proton's research and development team to evaluate new automotive designs faster, which will greatly enhance the company's competitiveness in new model production, Proton said in a statement released here today.

The rapid prototyping process enables the conversion of three dimensional computer-aided design (CAD) data to accurate, machine generated prototypes in less than one-third the time of traditional methods.

Without the rapid prototyping technology, two dimensional drawing data had to be used to manually make prototypes. Proton's previous prototypes were mostly made in Japan.

Present at the closed door event held in conjunction with Dr Mahathir's private visit to the plant were Proton's chairman Datuk Mohd Saleh Sulong and chief executive officer Tengku Mahaleel Tengku Ariff.

Proton said it first decided to acquire the rapid prototyping technology in mid-1997 to enable it to design and build its own car.

It said high technology like rapid prototyping could turn Malaysia into a technical base for manufacturing research for the entire region.

Tengku Mahaleel noted that with a capacity of 35 million cm of rapid prototyping parts per year, the Proton centre would be the largest in Asia and Australia, excluding Japan.

Proton said the prototyping service would not be limited to the automotive industry alone but would also serve other industries for the production of prototypes, moulds and tools needed for short production runs.

Dr Mahathir later launched Proton's website which furnishes the company's corporate profile, taking visitors through a tour of its plant as well as the interior of the Proton Putra 1.8EXi.

The website also allows for on-line job applications, contains past press releases and provides information on Proton model ranges.

Proton said in a separate statement that the launch of the website under the address www.protoncar.com was in keeping with the nation's commitment to the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project as well as signifying Proton's readiness to enter the 21st century's era of information technology.

It said the creation of the website was in tandem with Proton's current move towards a highly structured global supply chain by tightening its linkages with suppliers and customers.

Proton expects the move would make a positive impact on its product quality and customer service.

As a marketing tool, the website is expected to provide customers, especially international ones, immediate access to information on Proton, who believes that with the right promotions and marketing techniques, the website would be an excellent platform to strengthen its brand image globally, increase its customers database and even venture into on-line sales on the net.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir witnessed an ISO 9002 certificates presentation ceremony, where Tengku Mahaleel received the certificates from SIRIM chief executive officer Dr Ariffin Aton.

Proton was awarded the ISO 9002 Quality Management Systems certifications from Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) of the United Kingdom and SIRIM, effective Jan 12 this year.

Proton said it first embarked on the ISO 9002 quality programme six months ago, with the objective of becoming more competitive in the global market place.

It said SIRIM's certification was to reinforce the domestic customer confidence in its cars while that from VCA was a boost to its export expansion plans of expanding current market bases and seeking new export markets in 1998.

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir presented certificates of appreciation to Proton's ISO 9002 implementation team, headed by Yasim Mohamed of Systems and Processes Audit Department of the Quality Division. -- BERNAMA

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