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Mahathir - car

PRESERVE NATIONAL CAR IDENTITY, PM TELLS EON

SHAH ALAM, June 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Proton, maker of the national car, has to preserve the identity of the Malaysian-made automobile given the present trend of giant auto-makers straddling the globe and reducing small manufacturers to serve only as their assemblers.

"This trend will make our car lose its identity as a national car and turn us into just a mere manufacturer of cars invented by these mammoth firms," he said when officiating at a reception to honour the one millionth customer of EON, the distributor of the national car.

Urging Proton to be always cautious against this trend, he said the company should be able to maintain the identity of the national car through cooperation with partners like Mitsubishi, Lotus and other small companies.

"Although the trend now is towards giant companies operating throughout the world, we can continue to keep our identity if we stay alert.

"We should be on guard ... while we don't reject cooperation with these giant companies, the identities of Proton and EON must be maintained," he said.

The Prime Minister said this could be done by ensuring that Proton came out with attractive models from time to time.

"For this, we need an open mind... a willingness to accept new technology and to try new ideas on our own to be unique in that way," he said.

Tracing back the establishment of the national car industry some 13 years ago, Dr Mahathir said it happened at a time when the country was experiencing economic problems prompting some people to say the government's move was unwise and over ambitious.

He said that due to the dwindling domestic demand for the car now, efforts must be made to step up exports.

"We hope we can nearly double last year's exports. This is one of the blessings of the economic slowdown because previously we didn't give serious attention to export opportunities," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he believed many other overseas markets were keen to buy Proton cars, and hoped one day exports would exceed domestic sales.

He said he would like to see Proton and EON creating another history within a short period by producing and selling another million Proton cars with 900,000 of them for export markets.

At the function, the Prime minister presented a cheque for a million sen to Yeoh Eng Keat, an engineer from Pulau Pinang who emerged as EON's one millionth customer when he bought a Proton Wira 1.3 GL Manual.

He also presented souvenirs to those who have helped to promote the national car including journalists, Fomca, dealers and distributors.

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