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RM261mil spent on research, development

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PERUSAHAAN Otomobil Nasional Bhd has spent RM261 million to date for its research and development set up, including RM180 million for the recently-established vehicle design development facilities.

"For the present R&D set up, we have invested a total of RM261 million," Proton chairman Tan Sri Mohd Saleh Sulong said before the launch of Proton Total Research and Development facility by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Shah Alam, Selangor on Saturday.

The five-department facility is the final building block that Proton needs to be a complete car manufacturer. The five departments in the R&D facility are engineering design, engineering services, planning, styling, and homologation.

"Proton R&D facility has the capability to support the full product developmental process from styling to engineering, prototyping and testing," Mohd Saleh said.

He said the R&D division now has 300 research personnel, of which 60 per cent are engineers engaged in advanced and application engineering works tied to design, prototyping and test.

"While supporting its own manufacturing operations, this R&D set-up is geared towards the creation of intellectual property assets."

Proton is now working with local and overseas research agencies such as Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia, Mimos Bhd, Sirim Bhd, Islamic University of Malaysia, Universiti Malaya, Lotus Engineering and UK-based Frazer-Nash.

Mohd Saleh said the R&D facility provides opportunity for access and business partnership to the vendors, related industries and other parties.

He said facilities such as rapid prototyping and testings could be utilised for this purpose.

He also said 10 tier-one vendor companies were presently involved in the designing of a new Proton model.

"Even though the vendors have their own R&D establishments, the latest facility here would assist them to attain high quality and more precise designs.

He added: "The opportunities for local and overseas parties include joint development work on Proton's components using indigenous material and latest technology."

Giving an example, he said US-based motorcycle specialist Kenny Roberts had utilised the Proton's rapid prototyping facilities for the development of its new design motorcycle engine component for the recently-ended 1999 Malaysia Motorcycle Grand Prix.

Another facility is a RM30 million emission laboratory, said to be one of its kind in Asean.

The facility was recently approved by UK's Road Transport Department through Vehicle Certification Authority to carry out emission testing for European bound vehicles.

Carrying out emission testing in-house will result in substantial savings in terms of development time and cost. Proton previously had to out-source its emission testing abroad.

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