

19/07/2000

## Attempts to take over Proton revealed

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir yesterday revealed attempts by giant automotive companies to take over national car manufacturer Proton.

He said they had offered to acquire 100 per cent stake in the company, promising that consumers would be able to buy Proton cars at cheaper prices as they are more efficient.

However, Dr Mahathir said the Government resisted the offers as it fears that Proton could one day be turned into a plant to assemble their own cars instead of Protons.

The Prime Minister said this in response to Opposition Leader Datuk Fadzil Noor (Pas-Pendang) during the question-and-answer session at the Dewan Rakyat.

Fadzil had earlier asked about Asean countries' response to the decision to extend protection for the automotive industry with the coming of the Asean Free Trade Area.

Dr Mahathir said the world has seen how large automotive companies crush smaller competitors to gain control of the market.

"That's why we have acted cautiously and resisted pressure from the International Monetary Fund to open up our market. We will not allow Proton to be acquired so that it can be closed, resulting in us having to buy imported cars that we ourselves assemble."

When Malaysia proposed that the automotive industry be excluded from Afta until 2005, Dr Mahathir said none of the Asean countries objected as they now realise the dangers posed by globalisation.

"When Afta was agreed upon, Asean members did not really understand the dangers of opening their markets and things like borderless trade.

"But as we know, rogue traders caused the devaluation of currencies, giving Asean countries a wake-up call that globalisation might have negative effects."

The intention of the rich countries, Dr Mahathir said, is to control the world's economy, especially the automotive industry, even ruling that only five companies should exist.

To a question from Datuk Jamaluddin Jarjis (BN-Rompin) on government assistance to companies which have been labelled as bailouts, Dr Mahathir said it is unfortunate that there are people in the country who have championed this for political gains.

He said there are outside quarters who do not want to see Malaysia's continued success, thus various allegations such as cronyism were made against the country.

"What we are doing is to create a balance between the Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras. Therefore, there will be Bumiputeras who will be given opportunities to succeed in business.

"Sadly, these Bumiputeras will be labelled as government cronies. If we do not want to see them successful because they will then become cronies, the Government cannot then extend help to anyone."

If this is the case, Dr Mahathir said, policies such as the New Economic Policy will then fail, a scenario cherished by foreigners who regard it as a stumbling block to their quest to control the economy.

"Unfortunately, this is supported by people who do not know the evil intention of these foreigners...they just see it as something that can be turned into an issue for their political interest."

To the original question from Wan Nik Wan Yusoff (Pas-Bachok), Dr

Mahathir said under the concept of a borderless world and globalisation espoused by the developed countries, making as much profit as possible is the ultimate goal.

"Like the attacks by currency traders, they do not see the hardship caused by their action such as people losing jobs, riots and the killings," he said.

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