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Proton launches MPV `Juara`

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Proton will roll out several new models in the next three years to add to the 11 already in its stable.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had seen the designs of these models and described them as impressive.

"They are worth waiting for," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after launching Proton's first mini multi-purpose vehicle, Juara.

Also present were Proton chairman Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican and chief executive officer Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff.

Juara, Proton's 11th model since the national car manufacturer started operations 16 years ago, is available immediately at slightly over RM49,200 on the road.

Tengku Mahaleel said Proton was committed to introduce at least one new model a year, but whether more would be offered this year depended on its ability to meet testing requirements and quality standards.

"There are many more coming out. As I have said earlier, every year we will have at least a new model.

"There is a lot of work currently being done on high-performance and niche models as well as in refreshing the basic Proton models," he said.

The CEO pointed out that the launching of Proton Waja last year and the Juara today was testimony of this.

Proton, with the help of its British sports car and engineering subsidiary Lotus Group plc, is working on a sports model and a small SUV (sports utility vehicle).

There has been concern over the country's first national sports car programme due to the delay of Lotus' flagship super sports car M250 development by another four years.

The M250 forms the basis of Proton's sports car tentatively named Proton Ultimate.

On Juara sales, Dr Mahathir, who was impressed with the mini MPV's design and features, said he expected 10,000 units to be sold annually.

For the remaining four months of this year, a sales volume of 5,000 to 6,000 is expected.

The model is earmarked for export in two to three years.