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Sharp Corp makes significant contribution to the economy

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IT BEGAN producing portable radios at its first overseas plant in Sungai Petani, Kedah, 25 years ago. Now, Sharp Corp of Japan has extended its line of products to include audio equipment, cordless telephones, fax machines, and other electronic devices.

Many of these products are exported to the US, Europe and Japan itself, and the company, through Sharp Roxy Corp Sdn Bhd (SRC), has over the years made a significant contribution to the development of the Malaysian economy.

As a major base for audio and communications equipment, SRC produces high-technology key components, such as compact disc (CD) mechanisms, CD pickups, CD-ROM units, mini-disc (MD) units, MD pickups and other devices that require highly sophisticated processing technology.

SRC has also actively pursued the transfer of technology from Sharp Corp Japan to help develop Malaysia's economy.

As a result of these efforts, a team of Malaysian engineers, in January 1991, produced seven new models of stereo radio cassette recorders - an important milestone for SRC and Malaysia.

Since then, the company has been working together with Sharp Corp to develop mini-component audio systems, CD radio cassette recorders and other equipment.

Sharp Corp has grown to establish six companies, with four manufacturing plants which are located in Sungai Petani, Batu Pahat, Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam.

Besides SRC, the other Sharp companies in Malaysia are Sharp-Roxy Electronics Corp (M) Sdn Bhd, which is located in Batu Pahat, Sharp Manufacturing Corp (M) Sdn Bhd (Batu Pahat), Sharp-Roxy Appliances Corp (M) Sdn Bhd (Petaling Jaya), Sharp-Roxy Sales and Service Company (M) Sdn Bhd (Shah Alam) and Sharp Electronics (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd (Shah Alam).

Sharp's continued confidence towards the Malaysian economy was best described by the visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to its research and development centre in Tenri city, near Osaka, last Friday. In his welcoming speech, Sharp Corp president Katsuhita Machida said Sharp's commitment in Malaysia for the last 25 years has grown steadily.

"The turnover from the four manufacturing plants in Malaysia last year was at RM6.8 billion which represents 2.1 per cent of the Malaysian gross domestic product.

"In terms of exports, Sharp's plants in Malaysia exported products worth RM5.8 billion and this represents 1.6 per cent Malaysia's total exports," he said.

For future collaboration, Machida said he hoped Sharp will be able to locate its latest technology manufacturing plant in Malaysia such as the liquid crystal display (LCD) product.

Dr Mahathir, who was impressed with the facility at Sharp's research and development centre, also expressed hope that the Japanese electronics and electrical giant will locate its manufacturing facilities in Malaysia.

During the visit, the Prime Minister held a private meeting with Machida, which raised speculation that Sharp was going to invest big-time in Malaysia.

However, Dr Mahathir dismissed such suggestions during a press conference on the last day of his visit, saying that specific matters were

discussed and that Malaysia appreciated Sharp's commitment to boost the Malaysian economy and hoped for more investment.

Prior to the visit, a news report said that Sharp Corp plans to set up an LCD television manufacturing plant in Malaysia in 2003, in line with the implementation of the Asean Free Trade Area.

Sharp-Roxy Sales & Service Company (M) Sdn Bhd managing director Kiyoshi Yasumoto had said the company was seeking a regional LCD manufacturing centre in a country that offers cheap operational costs and labour.

He had said the possibility of setting up the LCD production plant in Sharp's television factory in Batu Pahat, Johor, is part of Sharp's technology transfer programme aimed at enhancing the LCD technology and market in Malaysia.

With capital investment of RM220.5 million, Sharp's manufacturing plants employed 8,423 workers.

Last year's turnover of RM6.8 billion was an increase of 120.7 per cent against 1999, while the export amount for 2000 was at RM5.8 billion, a 119.2 per cent increase from the previous year.

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