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Proton ready for Afta

KUALA LUMPUR: Car manufacturer Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) is ready for the Asean Free Trade Area market when Malaysia opens up its motor sector in 2005, says Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

"Afta was not something mooted yesterday but in 1993 and they (Proton) have 12 years to prepare themselves. Proton had reported to Miti that it is ready for Afta," Rafidah said yesterday.

She said Proton and its vendors had initiated plans through internal restructuring, changes and adjustments as well as taking into account the latest developments in the composites industry.

She said Proton's preparations for Afta also saw the national car manufacturer developing its own engines.

"If Proton had not taken steps

to face the competition then good luck to them. Fortunately, they knew what was coming. Proton had even developed their own engines," Rafidah said in her keynote address: "WTO: What it means to Malaysian businessmen".

She added that Proton executives were part of the country's negotiation team and had given inputs on how to prepare the auto sector.

To a question from reporters on the reduction of tariffs for the auto sector, Rafidah said: "Let the Prime Minister announce it."

Last November, Mahathir said car prices would not come down when Afta was implemented for the auto sector in 2005 as the government would impose other domestic taxes on both locally produced and imported vehicles. - theedgedaily.com