

# Proton gears up for bigger market share in Syria

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PERUSAHAAN Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton), through its local marketing partner Modern Technology and Trading (MTT), is gearing up to capture a bigger share of the passenger car market in Syria with more aggressive strategies.

Barely two years after the first Proton was exported into the country last year, it has cornered 5% of the passenger car market successfully.

MTT president and chief executive officer Ghyath Habbal said he was confident that the company's strategy of selling cars with the guarantee of excellent after-sales service would enable Proton to overtake South Korean and Japanese-made cars in the equivalent price range.

He said the *Waja* model priced about US\$27,000 was the best-selling Proton car in Syria, and especially popular among young professionals.

In fact, Syria is the best foreign market so far for the model.

MTT had recently invested between US\$2.5mil and US\$5mil in a state-of-the-art showroom in Harasta, about 30 minutes' drive from the capital city.

The showroom was opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the end of his two-day official visit to Syria which started on Sunday.

Proton CEO Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Arif said the prospect for increasing Proton car sales in Syria was very good, especially with MTT's plan to import the *Arena* model.

Based on Proton's study, he said, the affordably-priced *Arena* would be a hit in the local market.

"We also plan to market our latest own-designed products. For this market, price is not the factor as the car is targeted at young businessmen who simply love the sense of driving a good car," he said after the launch of the showroom.

Mahaleel said Proton had also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Syrian government to explore the possibility

of transferring its technology to the local people.

He said a study, which was expected to take up to three months, would be carried out soon to assess the feasibility of such a venture.

The study would not only consider setting up an assembly plant, but also the whole process of car-making by transferring the technology of manufacturing all 40,000 car parts and components to the local people, he added.

"If this plan becomes a reality, it will be our contribution to help Syria develop its own small- and medium-scale industries, especially in forming and casting, design and structures, and electric and electronics, which can enable local businessmen to venture into other types of manufacturing industries.

"This in turn will attract foreign investment in the manufacture of parts and other related industries. Proton is here not only to sell cars but also help in nation building," he stressed.