

Leave Proton cars alone

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Bring in other types of models, AP holders told

KUALA LUMPUR: Vehicles imported by AP (approved permit) holders are not meant to compete with cars produced by Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional (Proton), said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He explained that AP holders were supposed to facilitate the import of vehicles with bigger engine capacity and size, or category of cars that were not produced by national carmakers.

"The cars we are importing ... we wouldn't want cars of the type that compete with Proton in terms of engine capacity and size. They (AP holders) should concentrate on bigger capacity cars," he told reporters after opening Enterprise Asia, an exposition for small- and medium-sized enterprises, at the Putra World Trade Centre here yesterday.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had urged the Government to issue APs with the national car industry in mind.

Dr Mahathir, who is Proton adviser, had said that although the AP system was generally good, some AP holders were importing cars in the same category as that produced by Proton, and under-declaring the cost of the vehicle, at times "even below the

cost of raw materials."

Abdullah said the Royal Customs and Excise Department was aware of AP holders who under-declared the value of imported cars.

"They are investigating and taking action and I want them to continue with the effort," he said.

Asked to comment on China's reluctance to allow Malaysian cars to be sold in its market, Abdullah, who is also Finance Minister, said the Government hoped countries which exported cars to Malaysia would "reciprocate." He urged local car manufacturers to strive harder to penetrate overseas markets.

On escalating HIV infections, Abdullah said the Government was considering giving free syringes and condoms to injecting drug users.

"Many people who are ill are still sexually active and the chances of infecting others, usually their partners, are high. We have to find the best approach to stop the disease from spreading because it is at a critical level," he added.

Abdullah said Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek would liaise with Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdullah Zin to explain the rationale of the proposal to Islamic religious leaders.