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Proton plans to assemble cars in Syria

PROTON is looking to assemble cars in Syria while assisting the country to build up its heavy industry, following a Memorandum of Understanding signed with Modern Technology Trading Co (MTT) on Sunday.

Proton chief executive officer Tengku Mahaleel Tengku Arif said MTT began importing the Proton Waja and Wira last year, and was now looking to go one step further.

"We are trying to look at a total alliance with MTT, with the help of the Malaysian and Syrian Governments, to develop their small-medium industries through the automotive industry," he said.

The two companies will take the next three months to study the viability of the project.

Earlier, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched MTT's Proton showroom in Harasta, near Damascus.

At seven million square metres inclusive of the service centre, the sleek showroom is the largest in Syria.

Tengku Mahaleel said Syria had asked for Malaysia's assistance to develop an automotive industry following its success in building up Proton in just 15 years.

"Malaysia is among the nine countries in the world that can design a car from a blank sheet of paper to market," he said.

In the process, Proton also created an industrial base for Malaysian manufacturing.

Last year, about 650 Protons were sold in Syria, of which 80 per cent comprised the Waja which costs about US\$27,000 each (RM102,600) which makes Syria the largest-selling Waja importer.

At present, it has a five per cent market share. The Syrian passenger car market is relatively small, about 15,000 units a year with customs duty at 140 per cent.

MTT's chief executive officer Ghyath Al-Habbal said the sale of Proton was a package inclusive of after-sales customer service.

Proton's overseas operations account for five to 10 per cent of its revenue and steps are being taken to make it 30 per cent.

Tengku Mahaleel also said Proton would be coming out with new models soon.