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PM: Improve products to stay competitive

M.K. Megan

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysian industries, especially the automotive and engineering sectors, should constantly improve their products through research and development so that they stay competitive in the international market, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister said R&D was important and industries should never be satisfied with what they had achieved.

"We have to constantly improve and upgrade whatever we have, whatever we do and whatever we produce so that our standards are on par with those of other people (countries).

"We cannot rest on our laurels. Today, our national cars are of world standard. But in future, if we are not careful and if we do not follow the trend (worldwide) through R&D, the likelihood is that the quality will be substandard and we will not be able to market them outside the country."

He said even within the country, it would be difficult to sell the cars because soon there would be no restrictions on the import of cars.

"There will be no differential tariffs for national car producers to give them a headstart. So we must always upgrade our cars as we have to upgrade everything we produce in this country.

"The Malaysian automotive industry has come a long way and it can only get better if those involved continue to seek improvement in their products and services."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the launching ceremony of the 14-storey Naza Tower, which is being built in Kampung Baru, and the unveiling of the Naza Ria, Malaysia's first national multi-purpose vehicle produced by Naza Kia Sdn Bhd, at the Mines Convention Centre in Seri Kembangan, near here.

"I am confident we can achieve anything. I have seen how fast Malaysians learn to do something new in any field. If at first the product is not good, the second time it will be better. If we do it again and again, we will be good at doing whatever we are doing."

He cited South Korea as an example where when they came up with their first car it was not up to world standard.

"Today, they can compete in the world market."

He paid tribute to Naza Motors for having developed from a company that marketed reconditioned cars about seven years ago to a national car producer and hoped it would become the third biggest national car producer after Proton and Perodua.

The 2.5-litre seven-seater MPV is priced at RM98,888 for private registration and RM99,277.91 for company registration.

Earlier, Naza Group managing director Tan Sri S.M. Nasimuddin S.M. Amin said Naza Motors had received 4,000 bookings for the Naza Ria. They had since produced 7,500 units.

The MPV is being assembled by Automotive Manufacturing Malaysia Sdn Bhd in Pekan until Naza's own RM300 million factory in Gurun is completed by next year.

The factory will have the capacity to produce 50,000 units per year and will employ 1,000 people.

"When fully operational, we will launch two new models under the Naza brand. They will be exported to Asean countries," Nasimuddin said. Naza Motors is the franchise holder for Kia vehicles in Malaysia.

Nasimuddin later presented a Naza Ria to the Prime Minister and another to the Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti). It

was received by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, who is Bakti president.