

Proton comes under fire on Twitter
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KUALA LUMPUR - A government backbencher has defended the high price tags on imported cars and the government's policy of protecting Proton, only to attract a litany of grouses against the national car brand.

Responding to Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad's earlier statement that foreign car prices were high because of protective policies by the government, UMNO's Kota Belud MP Abdul Rahman Dahlan said Proton cars' high local contents was the reason behind their lower taxes.

"In its infancy, Proton did get help from govt. But now it is standing on its own. Government loans have been settled. No more protectionist policy. Proton is cheap because it was imposed lower taxes because it contains high local contents, and not because the government wants to protect," said Abdul Rahman.

Abdul Rahman also suggested that the government might be looking for higher income by imposing high taxes on import cars.

"Imported cars are expensive because of high taxes. Maybe the government wants more income," he added in remarks on micro blogging site Twitter.

The comments attracted a number of tweets, with many branding the MP's remarks as "idiotic" and "warped".

"Pricing not expensive because need to support Proton? You must be thinking that most Malaysians are idiots... like you," said one user.

'Marketing strategy'

On why Proton cars are sold cheaper in other countries such as in Britain and Saudi Arabia, Abdul Rahman (pic) said it was part of the "marketing strategy".

"In some countries, Proton (cars) are cheaper than Malaysia because of marketing strategy. They want to build market share. Nothing's wrong," he said, only to get several other responses.

"London's Proton is cheaper with better specification than Malaysia. We also want it cheap. Not the price, but the quality," was the response to Abdul Rahman's assertion.

"Foreign more expensive than Proton as Proton has more local content and not to protect it says BN MP, now I've heard it all and can die happily," quipped another, adding that the national car was a self-fulfilling project to benefit UMNO leaders at the expense of the people.

"I remember Mirzan [Mahathir, son of Dr Mahathir Mohamad] used to supply audio [sets] to Proton. There is a whole political patronage system built around Proton at the expense of the rakyat," lamented another user.

The Twitter exchanges also did not spare the recent controversy surrounding Proton's

decision to join the Formula 1 race next year under the Lotus Renault GP banner.

"Proton owns Lotus since '96. Never thought of entering F1. Why now? What gives? Or more pertinently, who gives and who takes? Will Proton come clean and tell us how much exactly it paid Gerard Lopez for 25% in Renault team?"

"If Proton was so interested in F1, why didn't Proton buy Renault before Gerrard Lopez bought it? Why now?" queried lawyer Azhar Azizan Harun.

Proton's group managing director Syed Zainal Abidin Syed Mohamed Tahir earlier said Group Lotus's spending on F1 would be a portion of its marketing and promotion budgets that had been allocated one and a half years ago, and claimed it would not affect the national carmaker's balance sheet. - Harakah Daily

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