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'Dr M should accept responsibility for Proton woes'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Former Proton chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad should not put the blame on the government, but must take full responsibility for Proton's state of financial affairs, leaders said.

Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said Proton was suffering from a "willing buyer, willing seller" situation that had nothing to do with the lack of nationalism and patriotism among Malaysians.

He said when the buyer was not willing to buy, then there was nothing the seller could do.

He said it was unfortunate that competition and globalisation had turned the world into a buyers' market.

"If there is demand, then you create the supply, but you cannot create demand by asking Malaysians to buy your product just because they

are Malaysians and Proton is Malaysian," he said in his blog yesterday.

Salleh said Proton was not government-owned but privately owned, and yet, Dr Mahathir had wanted Malaysians to help Proton as "sort of a national service or mark of patriotism".

"Personally, I have no argument with this. After all, I am as Malaysian as Dr Mahathir is, and anything that helps keep Malaysia's flag flying I would be most supportive of," he said.

However, he said, buying the national car should not be equated with nationalism or patriotism.

"It is about spending up to half your monthly salary (on instalments, road tax, insurance, fuel, toll charges, parking fees, service, etc), not including the depreciation, which can be as high as 20 per cent

the instant you drive it out of the showroom.

"So, when someone buys a car, it all boils down to just one thing — value for money — and whether you can recover your investment as much as possible when you decide to sell or trade in your car," he said.

Therefore, he said, "ultimately, the issue of market forces and the law of supply and demand dictates what you do".

Citing Sweden, Salleh said the Swedish government did not ask its people to buy Volvos to prevent the company from being sold to the Chinese, while Britain did not ask the British to buy Mini Coopers to prevent the company from being sold to the Germans.

Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Dr Puad Zarkashi expressed his disappointment that Dr Mahathir was trying to make the gov-

ernment a "scapegoat" for the problems faced by Proton.

He said the former premier should not point fingers at the government for Proton's failure since it was a private company.

"As chairman of a private company, Dr Mahathir should be responsible for what happened to Proton and not resign from his post.

"Does this mean he resigned from Proton because he wanted the government to bail out Proton since he is unable to save the national car company (from further losses)?

"The international trade and industry minister has said that one of the problems faced by Proton is that it is not professionally managed," he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

Puad hoped full disclosure would be given to the people so that Dr Mahathir could not easily blame the

government and tarnish Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's name.

"I support the call from various parties to set up a special committee to investigate, assess and report on Proton, as well as suggest concrete measures to save the national car industry," he said.

MCA spokesman and MCA central committee member Datuk Ti Lian Ker said the government should help Proton, but that the company and the International Trade and Industry Ministry should come up with a business plan to prevent it from incurring further losses.

"We cannot allow our pride or ego to drain the nation dry or bleed the people to death.

"Dr Mahathir must be a gentleman and admit to his misjudgement instead of conveniently passing the buck or putting the blame on others."

