

Hindustan Motors launches mini-truck

The vehicle is developed jointly with Shandong Shifeng of China

Special Correspondent

KOLKATA: C. K. Birla-controlled Hindustan Motors on Tuesday launched a mini-truck, which, it hoped, would utilise the substantial excess capacity that the country's oldest automobile unit had in the face of plunging sales of its flagship vehicle, Ambassador.

Talking to the media after the national launch by Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee of the first new vehicle in 28 years, company Managing Director R. Santhanam said that with retail finance becoming a serious problem in the last three months, Ambassador sales had nearly halved between July and October as compared to the same quarter in 2007. The mother unit at Uttarpara has an annual capacity of 24,000 units.

"With the new car 'HM-Shifeng-Winner' we hope to utilise some of the excess capacity," he said.

Production capacity for the new vehicle, developed jointly with Shandong Shifeng, a China-based automotive and agri-equipment company, is 1,000 vehicles monthly and newer variants of the mini-truck, including a CNG model for the National Capital Region (NCR), will be ready in about two months.

A national roll-out was planned in nine months, Mr. Santhanam said.

Moloy Chowdhury, Vice-President, said that while the chassis and the cabin assembly were developed by the Chinese company, the power unit, driving component and gear box were by Hindustan Motors.

Mr. Bhattacharjee said that



UTILISING EXCESS CAPACITY: West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (left) with Chairman of Hindustan Motors C. K. Birla during the launch of a mini truck in Kolkata on Tuesday.

— PHOTO: SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

• To produce 1,000 vehicles a month

• Plans national roll-out in nine months

this was a cheerful development after the very grim happenings in Mumbai.

"We condemn the happenings and pay homage to those who sacrificed their lives while performing their duty," he said.

He said that the State had suffered a serious setback after the pullout by the Tatas. "We tried to persuade them but they left under certain circumstances. We have to try again afresh since the State needs automobile and

ancillary units". He said that he had readily agreed to C. K. Birla's proposal to set up IT units and housing to utilise the excess land at Uttarpara. "He says he has just started developing the projects".

Company Chairman C. K. Birla said that this was an important day for the company.

The three external divisions for forging and castings were progressing well, Mr. Birla said.