

Nissan Profit Soars Amid Disaster

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TOKYO (AP) — Nissan Motor Co.'s January-March profit more than doubled to 75.3 billion yen (\$941 million) as the Japanese automaker achieved record sales despite production disruptions from last year's tsunami.

Nissan annual global sales reached a record 4.85 million vehicles, showing a remarkably quick recovery from the March 2011 earthquake that ravaged much of northeastern Japan, the Yokohama-based manufacturer said Friday.

Nissan, which makes the Leaf electric car, March subcompact and Infiniti luxury model, continues to be bullish — expecting to sell 5.35 million vehicles this fiscal year, up 10 percent for another record.

It also raised its forecasts for the fiscal year through March 2013, to a 400 billion yen (\$5 billion) profit, up from its earlier forecast for 290 billion yen (\$3.6 billion).

President and Chief Executive Carlos Ghosn said Nissan held up well in recent months amid serious hardships, including a slowdown in Europe, and was gearing up for more growth, banking on solid demand in China and other emerging markets.

Ghosn said Nissan plans to be the No. 1 Asian brand in China, Russia and India.

"Overall, it is going to be a good year for the industry," he told reporters, while noting that the soaring yen was a serious worry.

A strong yen hurts all Japanese exporters like Nissan by eroding the overseas sales value.

Nissan had eked out a 30.8 billion yen profit for the January-March period last year, battered by the March 11 tsunami disaster in northeastern Japan. Quarterly sales jumped 15 percent on year to 2.71 trillion yen (\$33.9 billion).

For the fiscal year through March, Nissan posted a 341.4 billion yen (\$4.3 billion) profit, up 7 percent on year, on 9.4 trillion yen (\$117 billion) sales, up 7.2 percent.

"It is an even more encouraging performance given the headwinds created by natural disasters, an overvalued yen and uncertain global economic conditions," said Ghosn.

Ghosn said Nissan was already strong in China, Russia and Brazil, but was also looking at even newer markets like Indonesia, Africa and the Middle East.

"Doing nothing in my opinion is the biggest risk," he told reporters.

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Nissan's vehicle sales growth in the latest fiscal year at nearly 16 percent outpaced the overall industry growth of 4 percent. Nissan global market share rose 0.6 points to 6.4 percent, it said.

The rebound is playing out at other Japanese automakers.

Toyota Motor Corp. reported earlier this week quarterly profit more than quadrupled to 121 billion yen (\$1.5 billion), and gave upbeat forecasts for the coming fiscal year, hoping to sell 8.7 million vehicles around the world this business year.

Honda Motor Co. reported its January-March profit jumped 61 percent on robust car and motorcycle sales, and forecast record global sales of 4.3 million vehicles for this fiscal year.

Nissan shares gained 3.3 percent to close at 804 yen in Tokyo. Earnings were released shortly after trading ended.

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