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Mahathir-Proton

RAMOS SUPPORTS ASSEMBLY OF PROTON SAGA IN THE PHILIPPINES

From Azman Ujanq

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BAGUIO (Philippines), Feb 5 (Bernama) -- Plans by Proton, Malaysia's national car manufacturer, to assemble the Proton Saga in the Philippines have received the support of Philippine President Fidel Ramos.

Because of the president's keenness to see the project take off, both he and visiting Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad held a second meeting in Manila yesterday specifically to discuss the proposal. o. +rip

"President Ramos is keen on the project and has assured that he will give whatever support necessary," Dr Mahathir told Malaysian reporters during a visit to the Philippine Military Academy in this highland city.

Both leaders held their first bilateral meeting shortly after Dr Mahathir arrived in the Philippine capital for a four-day official visit on Thursday, the first ever by a Malaysian prime minister.

Dr Mahathir said no decision was taken at yesterday's meeting to discuss the car venture because a number of constraints had first to be dealt with.

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Mahathir-Proton 2 Baquio (Philippines)

"Like other countries, the Philippines imposes certain constraints on the assembly of cars by foreign manufacturers and in this particular case, the main constraint is that they have not decided whether to issue another licence for a car assembly."

"Both sides are still working out ways to resolve the matter," he added.

Also present at the Mahathir-Ramos meeting on the project were the executive chairman of Diversified Resources Berhad (DRB), Datuk Yahaya Ahmad and Philippine Trade and Industry Secretary Rizalino Navarfo.

Yahaya told Bernama yesterday that under the proposed deal, DRB and a Philippine company will become the distributor of Proton Saga in the country.

He said the car market in the Philippines grew over 60 percent last year with over 30,000 cars sold. -- more

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Mahathir-Proton 3 Baquio (Philippines)

On his visit, the Prime Minister said he was touched by the hospitality of the Filipino people especially those who lined up roads from the airport here and at Subic Bay earlier to greet him.

Before arriving here, Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Dr Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah, four cabinet ministers and over 60 top businessmen, was given a rousing welcome at Subic Bay airport by thousands of people waving Malaysian and Philippine flags. Banners of welcome written in Malay also hung at strategic places.

"The Filipinos and Malaysians come from the same stock and they are very proud of this. Yes, I think my visit here is like a re-discovery of friendship between close neighbours," the Prime Minister said.

Asked to describe the state of relations between the two countries as a result of his visit, Dr Mahathir said, " Since independence, this is the first time that we have become this close."

Turning to the still unresolved Philippines' claim on Sabah, he said on its part, Manila was still working towards a solution which had so far not been possible because of the complexities of the issue. -- more

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Mahathir - Proton 4 Baquio (Philippines)

"The Filipino are sincere in their desire to normalise relations with Malaysia," he said.

During his visit to the Philippine Military Academy, which is equivalent to the American military academy "West Point", Dr Mahathir was given military honours -- reviewing an impressive parade by army, navy and air force recruits while a 19-gun salute boomed out.

Baquio, 245 km north of Manila is also known as the Philippine Summer Capital.

Earlier at Subic Bay, which until 1992 was the largest US military base overseas but which has since become a free port, Dr Mahathir was given a briefing on plans currently underway to turn the area into one of Asia's top export processing centres.

Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority chairman Richard Gordon said over 40 companies had set up operations and created over 10,000 jobs. -- more

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Mahathir - Proton 5 (last) Baquio (Philippines)

Malaysia's Genting Group has also "anchored" at the bay by investing in casino, hotel and resort projects.

Dr Mahathir, in his speech at the briefing, said he was pleased that a number of Malaysian companies had agreed to put their money at Subic Bay which had all the infrastructures required by foreign investors.

"I'm sure in future we can even have direct flights from Malaysia to Subic Bay," he said.

Tomorrow morning, the Prime Minister will wrap up his visit by flying to Davao City, in the Southeastern tip of Mindanao, 960 km south of Manila before returning to Kuala Lumpur in late afternoon. -- Bernama

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