

PM: Our car industry is open to all

Overseas
By SAAD HASHIM

PARIS: European and American car makers are welcome to help Malaysia push further ahead its progress in the automotive industry because the Government does not want to confine itself to Japanese technology, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

As a start, the Prime Minister said, France's Citroen might set up a third car operation in Malaysia because the company had expressed its willingness to transfer a greater degree of automotive technology.

It could go into joint venture with Proton or some other company. Citroen has an assembly plant in Pekan, Pahang.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was studying whether diesel engines, popular in Europe, could be promoted in Malaysia.

The Prime Minister, who test drove Citroen cars and visited the company's research division here yesterday, said he was impressed with Citroen's know-how in the automotive industry.

"I must say that our progress in the automotive industry has been faster than other countries, but we have to catch up quickly with others. That's why I'm pressing for the greatest amount of transfer of technology.

"We are not to confine ourselves to the Japanese. We will learn from others, especially after we have discovered that in Europe the diesel engines are very acceptable.

"So we are interested in the diesel engine. If possible, we would like to fit diesel engines to our cars and maybe market diesel engine cars in Europe," he said.

He said "the relationship with Mitsubishi would remain. We'll maintain that relationship, but at the same time we want to source technology from others.

"Maybe there are things we can learn from the French in terms of designing, French sophistication. We should not confine ourselves to only one source. We are not bound to stay with only one source."

Citroen's director Pierre Dumont said his company was looking forward to possible participation in Malaysia's automotive industry and was now looking for a partner and that it could be Proton.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir also met French Premier Edouard Balladur during which he asked whether the French Government would lift the visa requirement on Malaysians.

"The matter will be discussed again when I visit France in July," he said.