

Proton in talks with several carmakers on tie-ups

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NATIONAL carmaker Perusahaan, Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton), said it has held discussions with several global automotive manufacturers to explore product development and engineering alliances, including its current partner Mitsubishi Motor Corp.

In a statement, Proton said it has always listened to proposals for more than an alliance, provided it supports the national car programme and makes a strategic fit to the company for a win-win situation.

Proton was responding to a report yesterday quoting Ford Motor chief executive officer Jacques Nasser as saying that the US carmaker was keen to form an alliance with Proton.

In previous reports, Proton had said there were no definite plans with any party in respect to striking up a strategic alliance, including DaimlerChrysler and Ford Motor Co.

Ford, which has a large presence in Malaysia, and DaimlerChrysler, which recently acquired a 34 per cent stake in Mitsubishi Motor Corp, were narrowed down as likely choices to be Proton's strategic partner.

Speculation on a possible foreign partner surfaced when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Proton might sell up to 30 per cent stake in the company to foreign investors.

Dr Mahathir said a major US car manufacturer had expressed interest in buying a stake, but did not specify the company.

Ford Motor officials said Proton is attractive to the US company as it is Asean's biggest car producer and the only company with a research and development programme.