

01 FEB 2000

Mahathir-Citroen

CITROEN WANTS JOINT-VENTURE WITH PROTON TO CONTINUE - MAHATHIR

SEPANG, Feb 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today French car maker Citroen feels the collaboration between the company and Proton should continue.

The prime minister said Citroen president informed him this during their meeting last week.

"I met Citroen president and he gave this view on the existing cooperation. I am aware that Proton has a different opinion," he told reporters on arrival at the KL International Airport from a three-week vacation and working trip abroad.

Dr Mahathir said he would inform Proton of Citroen's view on its cooperation with the Malaysian national car manufacturer.

Citroen, in an agreement signed in 1997, agreed to have technical cooperation with Proton to produce a new national car based on the original specification of Citroen Saxo, a compact car of the same type as Proton Tiara.

Production of the Tiara, a Citroen-Proton joint-venture, began in 1996.

During his trip abroad, Dr Mahathir also met French President Jacques Chirac in Paris and discussed bilateral and international issues.

Commenting on the warm relations between Kuala Lumpur and Paris, the prime minister said it should not be misconstrued by other big powers as Malaysia was also prepared to have such close relations with them if they so wished.

He said the French seemed to be more sympathetic towards Malaysia's views and this naturally brought the two countries together.

"Certainly we are taking the opportunity to give our views on several international affairs including financial matters through the French," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with this development as France, a member of G7, was also keen to convey Malaysia's opinions to members of the grouping which comprises the richest nations in the world.

He said Japan was another G7 member state with which Malaysia had strong ties.

Dr Mahathir also elaborated on his decision to skip the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

According to the prime minister, he was originally scheduled to give a keynote address at the gathering but the programme was modified to accommodate the presence of other world leaders.

Dr Mahathir said he was then asked to participate as a panelist during a session along with financier George Soros, whom the prime minister blamed for contributing towards the economic crisis in East Asia in 1997.

"As a panelist, I would not be able to say much, only two or three minutes. So I think that this won't bring any benefit. They don't want to listen to us, they just want to listen to the developed countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that during his stay in London, he was contacted by his British counterpart Tony Blair.

-- BERNAMA

mam/ar sk