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Dr M: Young engineers do us proud

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the success of Malaysia's young engineers in the Petronas-Sauber project to design and develop car and motorcycle engines showed that Malaysia "can do and achieve anything".

"I am proud of them. My only regret is that there are too few of them," the Prime Minister said at the end of his three-day visit to Switzerland on Tuesday night.

Dr Mahathir, who visited the project site in Hinwill, a 90-minute drive from Zurich, said that these young engineers were involved in the development of highly-sophisticated engine technology.

"With this level of technology, we can even make aeroplanes and boats," he said at his Salon Panorama suite of the Interncontinental Hotel.

He said they had demonstrated a lot of confidence in what they were doing.

"They really understand the work they are involved in. They have learnt a lot from their experience, such as the use of composite material. Some of them were trained in Germany and speak fluent German."

He said this achievement meant Malaysia had arrived and can take on the world.

"Yes, they are not only an inspiration to young Malaysians ... they should inspire all Malaysians."

The 16 young Malaysians were part of the Petronas-Sauber project to develop and design a powerful, sporty and state-of-the-art car engine ready for commercial use in 2004.

Most of the 16, aged between 24 and 40, were fresh graduates when selected by Petronas for the project.

Some had had their training in specialised areas of engineering in the United States, and others at the Imperial College in the United Kingdom.

Dr Mahathir said although Petronas was trying out the engine in Proton cars, Proton would not necessarily be its only option.

"We can make the engine and sell it in the world market. But the high cost of producing the engine would be a problem," he said, pointing out that Petronas would have to produce between 400,000 and 500,000 units to make the venture profitable.

On his visit, which took him to Zurich, Switzerland's financial centre, and Geneva, its diplomatic centre and home of some United Nations agencies and many international bodies, Dr Mahathir said it was fruitful, with prospects of enhanced trade and diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Besides meeting with Swiss President Kaspar Villiger and members of his Cabinet as well as key representatives of the private sector, Dr Mahathir also addressed the 90th International Labour Conference where his keynote speech on globalisation drew applause and admiration from many delegates who were representatives of Government and workers and employers bodies.

Asked on the response to his speech, he said many people congratulated him and expressed agreement with him.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by a high-powered delegation comprising Cabinet ministers and businessmen, said Malaysia and Switzerland shared the same stand on several issues, including the way to deal with terrorism, a subject that has assumed a high degree of importance among European governments.

Among bilateral issues the two leaders discussed were the need to renew

diplomatic ties between the two countries in view of the increasing number of Malaysians, mainly in Zurich and Geneva.

Another was commitment on the part of the Swiss Government to help Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Agency access information on Perwaja Steel funds that are believed to have been deposited in Swiss banks.

Malaysian authorities maintain the funds were obtained illegally and the Swiss Government has given an assurance that its revered banking secrecy regulations will not apply in this because it does not support criminal acts, including money laundering and corruption, in the using of its banking system.

Responding to a question on whether Malaysia would also ask for the Swiss Government's assistance on other similar cases, Dr Mahathir said: "If there are. But at the moment, there are none."

He added: "... although there are people who say that I have money in Swiss banks. Well, they can make accusations. Just ask the ACA to investigate."

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, later left for a two-day visit of Luxembourg, a tiny European country with a population of about 400,000.

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