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DR MAHATHIR-PROTON
PROTON NEEDS FOREIGN PARTNER WITH STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

PUTRAJAYA, May 10 (Bernama) -- Proton is currently holding discussions to get a foreign partner but is not in a hurry to get one quickly as the national car maker has to ensure that the eventual partner has strategic relevance, says its advisor, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We don't have to be in a hurry (to find foreign partner), we need to evaluate things very carefully. If you get the wrong partner, you'll get into worse trouble," he told reporters after launching "GUTS", Proton's consumer magazine here today.

The chief executive officer of Proton, Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff, was also present.

Asked to comment on how close Proton was towards completing discussions with potential partners, Dr Mahathir said, "Very close. They can't be very far otherwise they can't talk."

He stressed that Proton was a strong company and "it is not a cheap company that is about to die."

"We should give ourselves time to consider these things properly. There is no rush. No need to rush as Proton is still healthy. Proton is still viable so we have to be selective," he added.

Asked on whether the potential partner should be strong financially, he said "it's not the money but it must have some strategic relevance."

Dr Mahathir said Proton was currently in discussion with some prominent companies.

"There are still other proposals coming in but we should give ourselves time to consider things properly, no rush," he said.

Asked on whether he would expect the deal to be concluded by end of the year, Dr Mahathir said, "Well, we hope so."

When asked whether Proton would seek minority shareholding in the partnership, Dr Mahathir said Proton must not cede control to the foreign

strategic partner or else the latter would be dictating terms and may even ask Proton to produce non-Proton cars.

"We should have faith in ourselves. Give ourselves a little bit of value," he said.

In reply to a question that South Korean cars were perceived as global cars while Proton's cars were considered as Malaysian cars, Dr Mahathir said it took the South Koreans 40 years to be where they were today while Proton only has a 19-year history.

He also said that if more Malaysians bought Proton cars and did not believe in rumours that the national car company was in trouble, then more foreigners would have a better impression of Proton. -- BERNAMA

WNZ OS SHY