

Dr M returns cars to Proton

BY WONG CHUN WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: The strained relationship between Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Proton management has taken a fresh twist with the former prime minister returning the seven Proton vehicles given to him.

It is learnt that the vehicles, which were to be used by Dr Mahathir personally and by his staff, were sent to the Proton headquarters in Shah Alam recently.

Sources said the vehicles included the VW Touareg, a four-wheel drive, and the VW Phaeton, which the Proton adviser often used for travelling.

"The others were Proton Waja cars, including two in Langkawi, which he used whenever he visited the island to look at development projects

there," sources added.

It is understood that the Proton management had tried to persuade Dr Mahathir to continue using the vehicles but he was adamant.

The sources said Dr Mahathir had started using his personal cars to travel to work, adding that he was "deeply hurt" by developments in Proton.

These included the controversial departure of chief executive officer Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff and the issue over the import of foreign cars through approved permits, which Dr Mahathir said had affected the sales of Proton badly.

The sources said they believed Dr Mahathir's decision to return the vehicles was not made at the spur of the moment but after serious reflection.

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Mahathir's decision not to be taken lightly, say sources

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"You must understand that Dr Mahathir was the man who mooted the national car project and for him to return the Proton cars is certainly something not to be taken lightly," they added.

Proton Holdings Bhd announced on July 25 that Tengku Mahaleel's tenure of service would not be renewed and he would be on leave till the expiry

of his contract on Sept 30.

Pending the appointment of a new CEO, the management of the company is now in the hands of four men.

The group executive committee running the show comprises Proton chairman Datuk Mohammed Azlan Hashim, operations director Datuk Kisai Rahmat, Proton Tanjung Malim CEO Datuk Kamarulzaman Darus and board direc-

tor Badrul Feisal Abdul Rahim.

On July 26, Dr Mahathir indicated that the departure of Tengku Mahaleel might have been a result of "boardroom politics, which, I think, has spilt over to other politics."

"Powerful hands might be involved, I don't know. But my concerns are for Proton, a national project which a lot of people admire," he said.