

Pak Lah waiting to meet VW chief

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he is willing to meet Volkswagen's top official to discuss a possible tie-up with national carmaker Proton.

"I am waiting to meet the (Volkswagen) chief. He has indicated that he wants to see me. So, I am expecting him to come anytime," he told newsmen after attending the Heads of Mission conference here yesterday.

Abdullah had earlier said that Malaysia might allow Volkswagen to gain a controlling stake in Proton to help improve the fortunes of the firm.

His planned meeting with the German carmaker will be crucial, with the March 31 deadline to

name a strategic partner for Proton not being met.

The Government controls Proton through a 43% stake it holds in it through Khazanah Nasional Bhd.

Abdullah said officials-level talks with the potential partner were nearing completion.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who heads the Cabinet committee on the automotive industry, had said that the Treasury and International Trade and Industry Ministry had yet to submit a valuation report to the committee.

On reports that Proton's dwindling sales might force up to 70% of dealers out of business, Abdullah said measures would be taken to ensure their survival, including allowing them to sell other brands.