

No decision on Proton partner

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Cabinet yet to receive Treasury, Miti report

KUALA LUMPUR: It appears unlikely that the Government will make a decision on Proton Holdings Bhd's strategic partner by the end of the month deadline.

"The Treasury and Miti (Ministry of International Trade and Industry) were supposed to do a valuation and present it to the (Cabinet) committee but they have not presented it yet," Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said yesterday after delivering a special address at the Global Islamic Financial Forum.

Najib heads the Cabinet commit-

tee on the automotive industry.

As for the March deadline, he said: "Never mind. There'll be time. Don't worry. It doesn't matter if we miss it."

Earlier this month, Second Finance Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop had said that the Government aimed to make a decision on Proton's partner by the end of March.

Proton is currently talking to

German carmaker Volkswagen AG and talks are said to be at a "fairly advanced stage."

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

On a different matter, Najib said the Cabinet meeting yesterday made a number of decisions related to the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States and it

was now up to the respective ministries to take up these positions with the Americans.

He said Malaysia was not bound by any timeframe.

"Nor will we give away any fundamental positions that we consider to be very important to Malaysia," he said.

However, the US trade representative spokesman Stephen Norton said talks were expected to resume

in Washington in mid-April.

Meanwhile, Najib said the Cabinet had given the go-ahead for the RM3.1bil West Coast Highway project that has been delayed for more than 10 years.

The 215.8km-long proposed Taiping-Banting highway, was stalled by the 1997 economic crisis. Once completed, it would be the country's third longest highway.

Najib said the project would be awarded to the original contractors, Konsortium LPB Sdn Bhd, a joint venture firm.