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# Let DRB-Hicom decide

Dr Mahathir says it has prerogative to decide who will helm Proton

**PETALING JAYA:** DRB-Hicom Bhd is entitled to choose who it wants to head Proton Holdings Bhd as it now owns the latter, said Proton adviser Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"At the moment, Datuk Seri Syed Zainal Abidin remains the managing director, he is still being paid," he said.

"Of course he may not want to continue, it is not a question of sacking, it is a question of agreement between them as to how best to deal with the issue of redundancy, perhaps," Mahathir said at the sidelines of a roundtable session organised by the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia here yesterday.

"I think if Syed is not there, obviously it would have to find someone else, maybe one of its own DRB-Hicom people who is experienced in the automotive industry," he added.

Mahathir was commenting a recent report by a local newspaper which said that Syed Zainal had quit. DRB-Hicom has since denied the report.

Syed Zainal joined Proton in 2006 and has been credited for being the driving force behind the revamped Proton Saga that was launched in 2008. Prior to that, he was with second national car company Perusahaan Otomobil Kedua Sdn Bhd (Perodua).

Speculation that Syed Zainal was leaving the company came on the heels of former chairman Datuk Seri Nadzmi Mohd Salleh's resig-



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nation from Proton last month.

Nadzmi has been replaced by DRB-Hicom Bhd managing director Datuk Seri Mohd Khamil Jamil, who is currently Proton's executive chairman and executive director.

DRB-Hicom bought a 42.7% in Proton for RM5.50 sen a share last month. The company controls over 50% of Proton and intends to take Proton private as part of a wider plan to help restructure the loss-making carmaker.

On the issue of the recent sale of Maju Expressways, Mahathir likened the deal to

being possibly "as bad as selling Approved Permits" (the act of selling car import licences for a profit).

Reports estimated that the RM1.7bil sale of the highway by Tan Sri Abu Sahid Mohamed's Maju Holdings Sdn Bhd to EP Manufacturing Bhd could yield the former up to RM1bil in returns. A government grant of RM976mil was reportedly given to help build the RM1.3bil toll concessionaire.

"You sell what is yours, you don't sell what belongs to others," said Mahathir.