

France pushes Japan to accept Renault-Nissan merger: reports

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Japanese media reported Sunday that France wants a merger between

Renault and Nissan following the arrest of former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn, but according to France's economy minister changing the current set-up is "not on the table".

Ghosn headed a powerful alliance between Nissan, Mitsubishi and Renault before his arrest in November on charges of financial misconduct.

A delegation including Martin Vial—a Renault director designated by the French government—made the merger request at talks with Japanese officials in Tokyo, Kyodo News reported, citing sources close to the matter.

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A merger between the two is favoured by French President Emmanuel Macron, Kyodo said.

Japanese business daily Nikkei also reported the merger request by the French delegation, saying Nissan had been opposed to giving Paris greater sway over the Japanese carmaker.

According to Nikkei, the delegation also said Renault wants to name Nissan's next chairman—a post that has remained vacant since Ghosn was ousted on his arrest in November.

But the reports appear to contradict comments French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire made to Le Journal du Dimanche (JDD) newspaper, published Sunday.

"A shareholder rebalancing, a change in cross-shareholdings between

Renault and Nissan is not on the table," he told the French weekly.

Contacted by AFP, a French economy ministry spokesman had no comment to make on the Japanese media reports.

A 'stable relationship'

Macron last month held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Argentina, at which they only agreed to ensure a stable relationship within the three-way alliance, which also includes Japan's Mitsubishi Motors.

Abe reportedly stressed the importance of all three companies "maintaining their stable relationship" at the summit talk.

But the Japanese premier reportedly also said the fate of the group should be decided by "private businesses" and "governments should not commit to how the alliance should operate going forward", according to a senior government official quoted by Kyodo.

Last week, Renault said it had launched the search for a successor to Ghosn, after a Tokyo court quashed his appeal for bail as he faces three charges of financial misconduct.

But Le Maire also said in his interview with the JDD newspaper: "The principle of the presumption of innocence must apply" to Ghosn.

But over and above Ghosn's case, "there are also the interests of Renault and of the alliance", he added. "A business of this scale needs solid and stable governance."

The French government has called for a board meeting to pick Ghosn's successor.

Nissan, which holds a 15-percent stake in Renault, is widely seen as hoping to reduce the influence of the French partner on its management and review the alliance to make it more equitable.

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