

Double happiness

PM takes first drive across Asia's longest bridge in National car

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PENANG, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad must have been the proudest Prime Minister today when he took a historic drive across the Penang Bridge in Malaysia's very own car, the Proton Saga.

Two national dreams unfolded into reality as the bright red 1.3 litre model of the Saga pulled up at the main span of the \$850 million bridge.

The majestic twin towers of the bridge looming high into the sky provided a magnificent backdrop.

Dr Mahathir arrived at the main span at 8.45am after a 10-minute leisurely drive from the Jalan Udini interchange on the island.

He was followed by a long stream of vehicles carrying VIPs and heads of Government departments.

By his side was Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah and in the back seat Chief

By **CHRISTOPHER NG**

Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu, Works Minister Datuk S. Samy Vellu and Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional (Proton) chairman Tan Sri Jamil Jan.

A cool, gentle breeze and the warm glow of the early morning sun welcomed Dr Mahathir and his passengers as they stepped out of the car to stretch their legs at the main span.

A short briefing was given by Datuk Samy Vellu before he presented a

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pewter engraving of the bridge to Dr Mahathir and then it was time for snap shots.

The VIP photo session lasted about 10 minutes with Dr Mahathir and his wife posing with various officials involved in the Proton Saga and bridge projects.

When it was time to leave the main span, Dr Mahathir invited his wife to take the wheel.

"I hope you are all insured," she quipped as she got into the driver's seat.

Her husband joked: "I'll probably get high blood pressure."

With Dr Lim, Datuk Samy Vellu and Tan Sri Jamil still in the back, she headed for the other end of the bridge at Prai on the mainland.

From there, Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti boarded a helicopter and headed for Sungei Chenaam to attend another function.

The 13.5km bridge — the longest in Asia and the third longest in the world — is scheduled to be opened to traffic on Sept 15.

It was built by the Federal Government at a cost of \$850 million and negotiations are under way for it to be "sold" to the State.

The Proton Saga project, meanwhile, has cost almost half as much as the Penang Bridge.

Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia (Hicom) spent a total of \$405.4 million up to June 30 this year to bring out the Malaysian car.