

Rulers to unite all muslims in the country

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By LOKMAN MANSOR

THE Conference of Rulers, which met on Thursday, has agreed to take action or suggest ways to reunite Muslims in the country who have been divided by their political beliefs, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said the Rulers expressed concern over the situation after he briefed them on national affairs, particularly the problems facing Muslims in the country.

"This is their decision," he told reporters in Putrajaya yesterday after presenting the national flag to the Proton-PERT team representing Malaysia at the Gudang Garam Rally of Indonesia from March 31 to April 3.

Asked what type of action the Rulers would take, Dr Mahathir said that is up to them to determine.

On whether the Rulers proposal will be acceptable to Muslims among both PAS and Umno supporters, the Prime Minister said as Muslims they should accept any action or suggestion from the Rulers since they are responsible for Islamic matters under the Federal Constitution.

"At the same time, the Rulers cannot be involved in politics. If the problems faced by Muslims relate to religion, then this is the responsibility of the Rulers. And they will not act individually but as the Conference of Rulers," he added.

The 185th meeting of the Conference of Rulers, over two days, was chaired by Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur and ended on Thursday.

Earlier, in a brief speech at the handing over of the national flag, Dr Mahathir wished the Malaysian team success in the rally and reminded them to uphold Malaysia's good name.

The Rally of Indonesia is the first leg of the Asia-Pacific Rally Championship. Other circuits in the

Championship are Australia, New Zealand, China, Malaysia and Thailand.

Asked if he feels the Malaysian team is ready to participate in the World Rally Championship, Dr Mahathir said: "That is up to the people involved themselves to decide, but certainly we must always upgrade our capabilities and skills so that we can become participants in world championships."

Dr Mahathir, dressed in a baju melayu, even took the opportunity to display his

driving skills when he tried out the Petronas-PERT rally car in the parking bay of the Prime Minister's Department. He was accompanied by national rally driver Karamjit Singh.

Meanwhile, on Malaysia's chances to host the 2008 Olympic Games against the multi-million dollar campaigns of Osaka and China, the Prime Minister said Malaysia hopes to host the games even though this is the first time it has bid for them.

"According to the Olym-

pic Council rules now, there should not be too much campaigning to influence the council. You cannot invite them and entertain them as you used to before. This is a much more transparent and clear kind of campaigning," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia cannot afford to spend huge sums of money on bidding for the games, but it hopes the organisers will see the capabilities and facilities available in the country and take that into consideration.

"We hope we can get to be a host even if it is our first bid. Of course, if we cannot get this bid, we will continue to make a bid every four years," he added.

On Malaysia's failed Millennium Jump 2000 to the South Pole, Dr Mahathir said although he is unhappy that they (the team) failed in their mission, he hopes the failure will not discourage others from making bids to show that "Malaysia Boleh".

The Malaysian team failed to jump at the South Pole as planned, and instead jumped at Patriot Hill, some 1,000km from the original target. There was some controversy after the jump as certain quarters claimed the mission was successful.

"That is very bad indeed. I cannot accept that. If you fail, okay, you failed. It is better to lose sportingly than to try and say you win when you have lost," he added.