

PM: We're ready for the World Rally

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By S. Navalan

RIDING on the success of hosting the World Motorcycle Grand Prix and the Formula One race, Malaysia are now ready to host one leg of the World Rally Championship.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that after the success of hosting many international events, he is confident Malaysia can also be an excellent host for the World Rally Championship.

Dr Mahathir said this after presenting the *Jalur Gemilang* to Team Proton-Pert who will compete in the Rally of Indonesia on March 31-April 3.

The ceremony was held outside the Prime Minister's office in Putra Jaya.

Also present at the ceremony were senior government officers from the Prime Minister's Department and EON managing director Datuk Adzmi Abdul Wahab.

"We have always been a great host and should strive to be part of the best," said Dr Mahathir after the flag-handing ceremony.

"After the success of hosting the World Motorcycle GP and F1 races, I do not see why we cannot be a good host if we get a chance to host a leg of the World Rally Championships."

"We should always raise our standard in hosting international events."

The Prime Minister took the Proton-Pert rally car — a turbo powered Proton-Pert 4WD — for a spin after the ceremony.

The Malaysian team to the Rally of Indonesia would be led by veteran driver Karamjit Singh and navigator Allen Oh with Abdul Razak Dawood the team manager.

The team are sponsored by Proton-EON, and Petronas.

The Rally of Indonesia is the first leg of the six-leg Asia-Pacific Rally Championships (APRC).

This year, the Rally of Malaysia will be the fifth leg of the APRC. The four other legs are in Australia, New Zealand, China and Thailand.

The Rally of New Zealand and China are also part of the 14-leg World Rally Championship which also includes stops in Argentina, Britain and Monte Carlo.

Dr Mahathir said he expect Karamjit and Oh to have a good run in the Rally of Indonesia race which has attracted 29 local entries, two teams from Europe and two from Malaysia.

Karamjit and Oh are top seeded in the race. Karamjit last competed in the Rally of Indonesia in 1997 where he won Group N and was sixth overall.

He also raced for the Proton-Pert side in 1996 and was second in Group N.

The rally will be flagged off from Merdeka Square in Medan City and will cover five stages.

Adzmi said the Proton-Pert team have been having success over the last seven years and won the Rally of Malaysia last year.