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MAHATHIR-BADMINTON R R R
BM

KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 16 (BERNAMA) -- THE MALAYSIAN THOMAS CUP PLAYERS WILL BE REWARDED WITH A HOUSE AND THE EXPORT VERSION OF THE PROTON SAGA IF THEY WIN THE CUP IN JAPAN NEXT MONTH.

IN ANNOUNCING THIS TODAY, PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID IT WOULD NOT BE AN IMPOSSIBLE MISSION AND THAT THE ENTIRE NATION WILL BE BEHIND THEM.

+THIS IS OUR BEST CHANCE TO REGAIN THE CUP AS WE HAVE A CAPABLE SQUAD BUT IT WILL BE UP TO YOU,+ HE TOLD THE PLAYERS AT A LUNCH HOSTED BY HIM AND HIS WIFE DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH AT THE PAN PACIFIC HOTEL HERE.

THE VALUE AND THE LOCATION OF THE HOUSE ARE EXPECTED TO BE ANNOUNCED LATER.

+THIS IS A MAJOR INCENTIVE BUT THE BIGGEST BOOST IS FOR YOU TO WIN THE CUP FOR YOUR COUNTRY,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID, ADDING THAT BADMINTON IS ONE OF THE GAMES WHICH MALAYSIA EXCELLED IN AT WORLD LEVEL. -- MORE

1709MST 16 05 90

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MAHATHIR-BADMINTON 2 KUALA LUMPUR R R R

+THE THOMAS CUP IS NOT AN INDIVIDUAL EVENT, IT IS FOR THE COUNTRY AND (AS SUCH), I AM SURE EVERY MALAYSIAN, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR POLITICAL AFFILIATION AND RELIGION WILL BE SUPPORTING OUR TEAM,+ HE SAID.

THE SQUAD LEAVES ON SATURDAY AND WILL BE INVOLVED IN THE PRELIMINARY ROUNDS IN NAGOYA FROM MAY 25 TO 27. THE SEMIFINALS AND FINAL WILL BE HELD INTOKYO FROM MAY 30 TO JUNE 3.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ALSO SPOKE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE AMONG THE PLAYERS AND ADVISED THEM TO PUT ASIDE TRIVIAL MATTERS SUCH AS UNSUITABLE FOOD OR ANY DIFFERENCES THAT MIGHT HAVE WITH OFFICIALS.

+THE MAIN GOAL IS THE CUP,+ HE SAID.

HE SAID SINCE MALAYSIA HAD BEEN CUP CHAMPIONS BEFORE AND CAME CLOSE TO WINNING IT TWO YEARS AGO, +YOUR MISSION IS THUS NOT AN IMPOSSIBLE ONE+. -- MORE

1722MST 16 05 90

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MAHATHIR-BADMINTON 3 KUALA LUMPUR R R R

HE TOLD THE PLAYERS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT EASILY GIVE UP HOPE EVEN WHEN THE ODDS WERE DOWN.

+PROVE THAT YOU HAVE THE FIGHTING SPIRIT AND FIGHT TO THE LAST,+ HE SAID.

AS A MORALE BOOSTER, DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH IS EXPECTED TO BE IN JAPAN TO WATCH THE TEAM PLAY.

MALAYSIA HAS BEEN GROUPED TOGETHER WITH REIGNING CHAMPIONS CHINA, SOUTH KOREA AND SWEDEN. THE TOP TWO TEAMS WILL MOVE INTO THE SEMIFINALS TOGETHER WITH THE QUALIFIERS FROM THE OTHER GROUP WHICH COMPRISED INDONESIA, DENMARK ENGLAND AND JAPAN.

IN THE PREVIOUS FINALS, MALAYSIA FINISHED RUNNERS-UP TO CHINA, AFTER A MEMORABLE 3-2 SEMIFINAL VICTORY OVER INDONESIA. THE LAST TIME THE COUNTRY WON THE CUP WAS IN 1967. -- BERNAMA

1744MST 16 05 90