

A moment to treasure with 'gift to the country'

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah are all smiles as they hold up the Thomas Cup at Seri Perdana yesterday.

Looking on are (from left) Cheah Soon Kit, Foo Kok Keong, Razif Sidek, Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) president Tan Sri Elyas Omar, BAM vice-president Datuk Roland Wong (partly hidden behind Dr Mahathir), Punch Gunalan (partly hidden behind Dr Siti Hasmah), Kwan Yoke Meng, Rashid Sidek, Jalani Sidek, Soo Beng Kiang and Rahman Sidek.

It was the first time the Prime Minister touched the trophy won by Malaysia on May 16 after beating the Indonesians.

Dr Mahathir was abroad during the finals.

He said he would not have been able to bear the tension of watching the team in action.

"I would not have lasted two minutes and would have run away," he quipped.

The Prime Minister took time to advise the shuttlers on their next task — the gold medals at stake at the Barcelona Olympics.

He advised the team not to rest on their laurels because the country regarded them as heroes. He urged

them to maintain their fitness, performance and strong spirit.

"You must always think of winning (when you compete) ... not for yourself only but for the country to achieve a respectable international standing.

"(The victory) means we can stand tall with the rest of the world," he said.

The Prime Minister had earlier feted the team and BAM officials to high tea.

Dr Mahathir also presented the team members, including the coaches, a gold wristlet each as a personal

gift in appreciation of the victory which he described as "a gift to the country".

He also announced that the Government would keep its word to reward the players but instead of matching rewards from various quarters, it would provide what was needed by the individual players.

"It could be some form of business opportunity or a licence ... it can be negotiated but it will ensure that

they can sustain an income after their playing days are over," he said. NST picture by Shahiman Sharip.