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PM: Well done, Hafiz (HL)

Ramlan Said; Kamarul Yunus

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today congratulated Hafiz Hashim on winning the All-England badminton championship, but cautioned Malaysians not to spoil the champion by rewarding him excessively.

"I congratulate and wish him the best. Now I would like to request everybody not to spoil him," the Prime Minister told reporters after witnessing the full rehearsal of the opening ceremony of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit at the Putra World Trade Centre.

"I hope the States will not give five acres of land, one million in money, after that they (players) will not be able to play any more because what they see is only land ...money ...land, money, five million, three million, one billion," he said, swinging his arm like a badminton player in a long rally.

"We have seen what has happened to our previous champions because you spoilt them."

Hafiz scored one of the biggest shocks in the 104-year history of the All-England championships when he upset defending champion and top-seed Chen Hong of China to win the men's singles title.

His 17-14, 15-10 win made him the first Malaysian in 37 years and the first unseeded player in 15 years to win the title, and ended Chinese hopes of equalling their record of winning four of the five titles.

The last Malaysian to win the men's singles title was Tan Aik Huang, in 1966.

Besides US\$10,000 (RM38,000) in prize money, Hafiz will also receive a bonus from Badminton Association of Malaysia president Datuk Nadzmi Salleh.

Although the amount, which is known as the "presidential bonus", has yet to be announced, Nadzmi previously rewarded players who won international grand prix circuit titles RM10,000 each.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in also congratulating Hafiz, said the victory proved that Malaysians could succeed if they were committed, dedicated, disciplined and believed in the spirit of Malaysia Boleh.

Bernama quoted him as saying in a statement today that he was "overjoyed" with Hafiz's victory.

"His victory has placed Malaysia prominently back on the world badminton map. It proves that our national badminton players can again achieve the glories of the 1950s and 1960s.

"I extend my heartiest and most sincere congratulations to Hafiz and all players and officials of the Badminton Association of Malaysia," he said.

Abdullah hoped that more such excellent performances would eventually return Malaysia to the ranks of world's top badminton powers.

"Hafiz, you have proven to be the best among the best, champion among champions. Keep it up," he said.