

**Punch Gunalan Contributed A Lot To National Badminton - Siti Hasmah
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PUTRAJAYA, Aug 15 (Bernama) -- Former patron of the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali has described the passing of national badminton hero Datuk Punch Gunalan as a great loss to the country as he had made tremendous contributions to the development of the sport in the country and abroad.

Saddened by the departure of the badminton ace, she said Gunalan not only did the country proud by winning international badminton tournaments, but also in guiding players to continue striving for excellence.

"We should be grateful to him. He had weaknesses, but he had always worked hard to develop national badminton," she told reporters here today.

Gunalan, 68, died of cancer at the Sime Darby Medical Centre in Subang Jaya at 6.20am today after falling seriously ill two weeks ago.

Dr Siti Hasmah, who is wife of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said when she met Gunalan recently, he looked ill and had to seek treatment in hospital.

She said Gunalan had encouraged her to get involved with the national badminton development, especially when he was BAM honorary secretary.

"Besides informing me on the development of national badminton players in each tournament, Gunalan also made arrangements for me to accompany the national squad when they competed in tournaments abroad," she added.

Dr Siti Hasmah said she cherished the memories of the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 where badminton was first introduced and Malaysia won the bronze as well as when Malaysia lifted the coveted Thomas Cup in Kuala Lumpur the same year.

She said Gunalan was also instrumental in transferring the headquarters of the International Badminton Federation to Kuala Lumpur.

"Gunalan had done a lot. He had also brought countries fond of playing badminton in Asia together, like South Korea, Japan, China, Indonesia and India. He worked really hard," she said while expressing her condolences to the deceased's family.

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