

**Punch Gunalan's Demise Great Loss To Nation – PM
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MECCA, Aug 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today described the passing of former national badminton ace Datuk Punch Gunalan as having the same impact as the loss of an eminent leader.

He said Punch's contribution to the development of badminton in the country was enormous and he helped make Malaysia a respected nation in the sport.

"I and my wife (Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor), who is the patron of the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) convey our condolences to the family of the late Punch," he told Malaysian journalists, here, Wednesday.

The prime minister is in the holy city for the two-day Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Extraordinary Summit beginning last night.

Najib said Punch helped to develop many young badminton players and in placing Malaysia as the second best nation in badminton. Punch, 68, passed away at the Sime Darby Medical Centre in Subang Jaya due to cancer. He leaves his wife P.Vijeyakumari, 64, and a son, Roshan Gunalan, 36.

He was a top singles and doubles player, having won in the All England and Commonwealth Games in 1971 and 1974.

Punch was given the National Sportsman Award in 1969 and 1974 before becoming badminton national coach and guiding the national squad to win the Thomas Cup in Kuala Lumpur in 1992.

He had held the post of Asian Badminton Confederation (ABC) honorary general secretary and president of the International Badminton Federation (IBF) from 2004 to 2008.

He was made BAM deputy president, his last post with the association, in 2005.

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