

A very special gift to the UN

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NEW YORK, Fri. — The people of Malaysia yesterday presented to the United Nations a beautiful *Tepak Sireh* set made of gold and silver, and encrusted with precious gems — 46 years after becoming a member of the world body.

The specially hand-crafted *tepak sireh*, which glitters under natural light, is displayed on the third floor of the United Nations building. It sits opposite an imposing and impressive barge — also made of gold — from Thailand.

Each member country can present a gift to the UN which is then displayed in the UN building.

The *tepak sireh* was presented by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to secretary-general Kofi Annan, minutes before the Prime Minister delivered his final speech as head of government at the 58th UN General Assembly.

Dr Mahathir explained to Annan the significance of the gift. In the olden days, the *tepak sireh*, a container for betel leaves, was a significant part of conversations, negotiations and important ceremonies in the royal courts, village gatherings and in the homes of ordinary people.

The betel leaf was offered to guests as an ice-breaker. The *tepak sireh* remains today as a centrepiece of traditional ceremonies.

“The *tepak sireh* is thus an im-



SYMBOL OF DIPLOMACY: The specially hand-crafted ‘Tepak Sirih’ presented to the United Nations on Thursday. — Bernama picture

portant symbol of diplomacy, dialogue, friendship and co-operation,” Dr Mahathir said, adding: “This is what the UN symbolises and should stand for during these trying times.

“The *tepak sireh* set, supported by four traditional Malay weapons securely sheathed in their scabbards, testified to the peaceful intentions of the Malaysian people and their hope for everlasting peace,” he said.

Annan, in accepting the gift, said: “There is no more fitting or important message that Malaysia could send to

the world at this difficult time in human affairs.

“That message is well in keeping with Malaysia’s constructive and committed role as a member State of the United Nations — as a contributor to UN peace operations; and as a leading voice for developing and non-aligned nations as well as a promoter of dialogue and understanding among the peoples of the world,” he said.

“That makes your nation particularly well-equipped to host next month’s summit of the Organisation



GLOBAL PARTNER: Dr Mahathir with Julian Robert Hunte, the president of the 58th session of the UN general assembly, after delivering his speech at the UN headquarters in New York on Thursday. — Bernama picture

of the Islamic Conference, which, given the events of the past year in your region and beyond, promises to be one of the most important in the history of the OIC,” Annan said.

The *tepak sireh* set is arranged on a tray surrounded by 14 condiment vessels or *cembuls* representing the 13 States and the Federal Territories.

The main box is supported by four traditional weapons, *Keris Semenanjung*, *Keris Tanjung*, *Parang Ilang* and *Tumbuk Lada*.

Designed by Henry Bong and produced by Pucuk Rebung Royal Gallery Museum, the concept was conceived by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar. — Bernama