

Dr M sad from STAR - 6 FEB 2002 Ground Zero visit

By JOHAN FERNANDEZ

NEW YORK: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad visited Ground Zero, the place where the World Trade Centre once stood, on Monday and came away with a "feeling that is difficult to describe."

"I saw it on TV but seeing it here is a different thing altogether. You feel that you are near to the incident and we know that our own people were killed here. We feel very saddened by what happened here," he told reporters at the site.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and his wife, were met on arrival by Bradford E. Billet, the Deputy Commissioner of the city of New York, Malaysian Consul-General A. Shahizan Ahmad and officials of the consulate.

They were escorted to the public viewing platform to see the devastated site.

Although nearly all of the debris has been removed and work is now mostly under-

ground, the magnitude of the damage was evident.

Among those in the crowd to meet the Prime Minister was Mr Lee Kim Liong, 39, a Malaysian from Kota Kinabalu, who lost his wife Siew Nya Ang in the tragedy, and Kenny Yik, a Malaysian micro-systems engineer who worked tirelessly in relief work after the incident.

Billet described the extent of the damage and showed a diagram of the site and the surrounding buildings that were affected.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah spent about half an hour surveying the disaster area and the ruins of the two towers.

Dr Mahathir placed a wreath of yellow and white flowers at a special wall that was erected "In Memory of the International Victims of the World Trade Centre, September 2001."

He and Dr Siti Hasmah signed on the wall where someone had drawn a Malaysian flag. The wall contains messages, photos and personal items of people killed or lost in the tragedy. There were also

bouquets of flowers placed on the floor.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah also spoke to Lee and offered their condolences.

Dr Mahathir said that it was most terrible to see pictures of people jumping out and falling to their deaths.

"I think anybody seeing that would suffer a terrible shock."

"What has been done here has aroused the anger of the American people and many others against people of the Islamic faith.

"We can understand that but we feel that when time has passed and people are able to think more calmly they should then make an analysis as to why this thing happened and how do you counter. Just letting go because you are angry is not going to solve problems," he said.