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Plucky Yasmine symbol of hope for the new Iraq

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YASMINE, the nine-year-old Iraqi girl who lost her legs during an attack on her village by invasion forces, went home last night. The feisty girl whose face painfully stared at us when Malaysian journalists saw her for the first time in a Baghdad hospital goes home to her mother, siblings, friends and relatives. Or the remaining ones that is.

Yasmine touched down on Malaysian soil on May 5 accompanied by local journalists who covered the Iraqi invasion in Baghdad. She came with heavily bandaged legs, accompanied by her father, Waadi. Yasmine arrived in Malaysia with the help of generous and caring Malaysians. And there are many of them.

Yasmine is a symbol of the destruction that war or military aggression can bring. She is also the symbol of the futility that such aggression brings. Men, with all their individual and collective wisdom, have never ceased to succumb to such futility. But the plucky girl is also a symbol of hope for the new Iraq, provided she can continue to keep her spirits up and provided her fellow citizens are allowed to be masters of their own destiny.

She would not have made it here if not for the help of many people. Having personally been responsible, to some extent, to bringing her here, I want to thank everyone who had, in one way or the other, been assisting me and Yasmine. I cannot thank every single individual because there are too many of them.

Everyone who has been involved with helping Yasmine, the Anak Angkat Malaysia, did not expect anything in return. The Chinese Maternity Hospital was among the first to respond, together with United Engineers, Aman Malaysia, Hasnah A. Rahman and her team at Communication Suite, volunteer doctors from Hospital UKM, Damai Specialist Centre, Kuala Lumpur Hospital, Swiss Garden Hotel, Adam and his company Iptel Communications, Saag Consolidated, the Red Crescent Society of Malaysia, the Royal Jordanian Airlines, volunteer translators and all Malaysians who gave money, gifts and who sent get-well cards and flowers.

Even though Yasmine herself had said "thank you" to all Malaysians, I feel that I need to express my gratitude to Cabinet members, their wives and colleagues, who took time to visit her and gave her encouragement during her stay at the hospital when she was undergoing surgery after surgery.

Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali visited her.

During her short stay here, Yasmine has picked enough words in Malay and English to get by. She may forget those words when she returns to her village, but I hope that she has enough fond memories of Malaysia and Malaysians. I believe, in all humility, we have tried our best to offer fresh hope to Yasmine to be able to stand on her own two feet to walk to her future.

I'm also grateful to our ambassador in Jordan, Datuk Sayeed Sultan Seni Pakir, and his staff who worked very hard to secure documents to enable Yasmine and her father to enter Jordan on her trip to and from Malaysia.

More than anyone else, I must express my gratitude and appreciation to all my media colleagues who took care of Yasmine after they had spotted her and her shredded legs in a looted hospital in Baghdad to the time she crossed the Iraqi-Jordanian border. To me, these individuals have gone

beyond their normal line of duty as fact-finders and story-tellers to become servants of humanity and harbingers of hope.

Thank you one and all. May God bless you. And may God guide and help Yasmine to a better future.