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Grateful Yasmine meets PM and wife

Tan Choe Choe

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - "Terima kasih Malaysia," said nine-year-old Iraqi survivor Yasmine Wa'adi repeatedly when she finally met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali today as they bade her a safe journey home to Baghdad.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah visited her at Nikko Hotel after paying a farewell call on South African President Thabo Mbeki who ended his three-day working visit to Malaysia today.

Yasmine, who lost both her legs in the United States-led invasion of Iraq, showed her prostheses to Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah after presenting them a paper bag with her picture on it that carried the message: "Thank you dear Malaysians, for giving me hope for a better life."

Dr Mahathir also received a card from Yasmine which she made with the computer that was given to her by United Engineers Malaysia (UEM). The card read "Thank you from the bottom of my heart".

In a short conversation with her, Dr Mahathir asked Yasmine if she wanted to return to school when she got back to Baghdad. She merely nodded with a wide grin.

He was pleasantly surprised and laughed aloud when she suddenly told him "I love Malaysia", after being mostly quiet throughout the conversation.

After some light banter, Yasmine insisted on walking the Prime Minister and his wife to their car, accompanied by hordes of photographers.

Present were Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaacob, Swiss Garden Hotel general manager Raymond Yeoh, UEM managing director Abdul Wahid Omar, Chinese Maternity Hospital chairman Tan Sri Tee Hock Seng and S. Kulasegaran, a member of the hospital's board of directors.

Dr Amara Naicker Naysaduray, Yasmine's rehabilitation physician, and Dr Sappiah Sanmugam, the chief surgeon in Yasmine's surgeries, were also present.

New Straits Times group editor Datuk Ahmad A. Talib was there to relate to Dr Mahathir how Yasmine was brought to Malaysia on May 5 on the initiative of the Joint Media Team Malaysia covering the war.

Earlier, the Press was invited to the Chinese Maternity Hospital where Yasmine was treated, to see how she could walk, dance and even kick and play ball with her prostheses.

Dr Amara said Yasmine recovered well and was already insisting on doing everything on her own.

She said all possible difficulties that Yasmine would face back home had been anticipated and she had been prepared to deal with them on her own.

"We do not know how bad the situation in Baghdad is, but she can walk on her knees if her prostheses are not with her," said Dr Amara, adding that the prostheses would last three to five years.

"The prostheses are modular types which could accommodate some degree of growth, but they would need to be changed as she grows taller and bigger," added Dr Amara.

When asked if she would come back to visit the many friends she had made in Malaysia, the cheeky Yasmine said "Insyallah (God willing)", adding that her Malaysian friends were very "naughty".

A request has been made to the International Committee of the Red Cross to take care of her when she is back in Baghdad.

She will be staying with relatives since the family home had been

destroyed in the attack on Iraq.