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# 3 Gaza aid activists arrive home

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SEPANG: After almost a month stranded on a humanitarian-aid ship to Palestine, three Malaysians, including two journalists, returned here yesterday evening.

The trio — a volunteer from the prime minister's office, Radzillah Abdullah, *New Straits Times* journalist Alang Bendahara and Bernama journalist Faizal Hasan—were given a warm welcome by their families and friends as they cleared the Immigration checks at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Present to greet them were Perdana Global Peace Foundation (PGPF) adviser Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and chairman Tan Sri Norian Mai, who praised the trio for their bravery.

However, nine other volunteers — six from Malaysia, including mission leader Matthias Chang, a Canadian, two Irish and two Indians, were still waiting to depart from El-Arish Port in Egypt.

The trio said they were relieved to be back home safely after enduring harrowing experiences, including having their ship — *The Spirit of Rachel Carrie*—shot at by the Israeli military, as well as having to survive on little water and food.

Although the ship's cargo would have to be temporarily stored at a warehouse at the port because they were not allowed to send it via the Rafah-Gaza border crossing, the crew members considered the mission a success, as the ship managed to get one nautical mile into Palestinian waters.



Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali greeting (from left) Bernama journalist Faizal Hasan, volunteer from the prime minister's office Radzillah Abdullah and *New Straits Times* journalist Alang Bendahara at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday. — NST picture by Mohd Fadli Hamzah

"We managed to get into Palestinian waters for the first time," said Alang.

The mission by PGPF, a non-governmental organisation founded by

former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was carrying 7.5 kilometres of UPVC (plastic) sewerage pipes to Gaza.

The ship left on May 3 and on May

16, the Israeli military fired warning shots at the ship for entering the restricted zone.

Dr Siti Hasmah said she and her husband appreciated the sacrifice of

those on board the ship.

Norian said they were liaising with the Egyptian government to release the remaining nine crew members and fly them back soon.