

IT'S been said that behind every successful man is a woman. But ask Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah and she'll say not just any woman, his wife. That, by all accounts, would be the case where her husband is concerned.

Almost from the start, she has been part of the equation and as a couple, they are peerless; not once have they been out of sync with each other in 22 years.

A doctor in her own right, Dr Siti Hasmah, nevertheless, has never competed with her husband, consciously or unconsciously, for the

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limelight. Her role, she says, has always been to support the Prime Minister.

Their marriage was truly made in heaven: both are good-looking and blessedly photogenic. Their sartorial style is tasteful and elegant – we've never had to cringe at the sight of the PM in a dreadfully loud tie or Dr Siti Hasmah being embarrassingly over-coordinated in her accessories – and their public per-

sonas a perfect foil to each other. He comes across as loftily intellectual, stern, reserved and formidable; she is down-to-earth, warm, kindly and eminently approachable.

Indeed, one wonders whether Dr Mahathir would have been so successful if he were married to anyone else. He acknowledged Dr Siti Hasmah's role as much when he said in an interview with *The Star* earlier this month: "She has not

only been a wife but a friend (and) a supporter who has shown a lot of understanding and patience all along."

Similarly, his children have not been a source of problems, controversy or embarrassment that distracted him from running the nation.

In the same interview, Dr Mahathir said he was fortunate that his children did not come "whin-

ing" to him and neither did they cause him any trouble.

Yet they have had to live with rumour and much speculation about the rewards of being the Prime Minister's children while trying to build their own lives, careers and raise families, much like other honest, hard-working Malaysians.

Now, all that is coming to an end. The nation bids farewell to a beloved First Lady and the First Family and in the second half of our special, we find out what life has been like them and how they view the future.