

National

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After 14 years, reunion joy for kidnap family

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MELBOURNE'S Jacqueline Pascarl has told of her joy at being reunited with her daughter who was stolen from her 14 years ago.

In 1992, seven-year-old Shahirah and nine-year-old Iddin were snatched by their father, Malaysian Prince Raja Bahrin, in a kidnapping that made headlines internationally and strained relations between Australia and Malaysia.

Now 20, Shahirah flew unaccompanied into Melbourne on Saturday for a reunion with her mother, formerly known as Jacqueline Gillespie.

The pair, along with Ms Pascarl's husband, Bill Crocaris, spent yesterday at Ms Pascarl's Hawthorn home.

Neighbours told the waiting media the pair had been seen in recent days visiting a nearby park, holding hands and laughing. "Apparently they were very happy — they were holding hands and taking lots of photos," a neighbour said.

The family declined interviews yesterday. But just after 11am, Mr Crocaris emerged from the house to read a prepared statement: "Jacqueline Pascarl and her daughter, Shahirah, would like to express their appreciation for your good wishes and support."

The family also conveyed its joy and need for privacy.

However, it is believed the Nine Network's *A Current Affair* and *60 Minutes* were bidding for exclusive rights to the story.

Ms Pascarl's ex-husband, Raja Bahrin, confirmed his daughter's visit. "It's only natural that she wants to visit her mother," he said. "She is a big girl now, going to be 21. She wants to be with her mother, so what is there for me to say?"

Raja Bahrin said the former couple's son, Iddin, now 23, had not yet expressed an interest in visiting his mother.

In 1992, the audacious kidnapping of Shahirah and Iddin captured international attention after their father snatched them during a routine access visit.

The children were smuggled from a hotel in Little Collins Street, hidden under a tarpaulin in the back of a ute and driven to North Queensland.

From there, they boarded a cabin cruiser fitted with long-range fuel tanks, which took them into Indonesian waters.