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Jeng Yen, Irwan - imperial organisers

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LAN Jeng Yen and Irwan Anwar are friends. I first met Jeng Yen at the Imperial College while waiting for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to deliver his speech at the Multimedia Super Corridor investors' conference.

Jeng Yen had gathered his friends from the college to greet the Prime Minister. While some had gathered to listen to the keynote address, many others had gathered just to catch a glimpse of the leader.

Jeng Yen was assisted by Irwan in gathering the Malaysian students to greet Dr Mahathir. Jeng Yen is from Petaling Jaya and is president of the Malaysian Students Society. He is pursuing an aeronautical engineering degree and has four years to get his degree.

Irwan is from Gombak and is pursuing a degree in materials engineering. As student leaders, the two had to ensure that the gathering of Malaysian students was done properly and in an orderly manner.

Apparently Jeng Yen has been pestering Hamidah Ashaari, the First Secretary (Information) of the Malaysian High Commission in London. Jeng Yen knew that the Prime Minister was coming to London to promote the MSC and his members had earlier on been pestering him to arrange a photography session with Dr Mahathir.

Hamidah's duty during the Prime Minister's visit was mainly to act as liaison officer between the Press and Dr Mahathir's office. She had been very helpful in terms of getting the Press itinerary sorted out besides the logistics on visits outside London.

The only advice Hamidah could give to Jeng Yen and Irwan was to gather the students at a strategic location and hope that the Prime Minister would be kind enough to grant them their wish.

To cut a long story short, he did. The students had gathered just outside the elevators on the fourth floor of the main hall where the Prime Minister had addressed the conference. Since the corridor outside the elevators was quite big, they had arranged chairs for the photography session.

They had engaged one of their friends with a camera to take the picture. The lad had his SLR camera on a tripod focused firmly on the crowd. Boys and girls had waited patiently for the photography session. It appeared that they began gathering at the corridor well before the Prime Minister concluded his speech.

Each time the left doors opened, there was a sense of expectancy among the students. The Prime Minister had a pre-arranged Press conference to attend and could spare a couple of minutes for the students. A roar from the students greeted the Prime Minister when he finally emerged from the elevators.

Jeng Yen and Irwan confidently strode up to the Prime Minister and asked if they and the students could have their photograph taken with him. "Of course, no problem," Dr Mahathir said.

After everyone had taken their seats, disaster struck. The cameraman couldn't take the picture because his flash was not functioning. Imagine the embarrassment of the cameraman and the disappointment of the students when this happened.

Repeated attempts also failed. But as fate would have it, yours truly was nearby. I had my Canon EOS 1000FN with me, fully loaded and ready to shoot. Seeing the frown on students' faces, I snapped a few shots on my

wide angle lens so as to get everyone in the picture.

Their faces lit up, there were plenty of smiles and a lot of handshakes after that. Jeng Yen and Irwan had done their duty as student leaders. It's not everyday that one can take a picture with the Prime Minister. For the students, moments like this were to be cherished forever.

The scene was repeated two days later at the University of Warwick, minus my camera. This time the crowd was bigger. It was a specific meeting between the Prime Minister and the students. The hall at the university's Art Centre was packed with Malaysian students from the campus as well as nearby universities in Birmingham and Coventry.

Some of them even brought their children and babies. As I saw in previous trips to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the students had mobbed the Prime Minister, shaking his hands, wishing him well and had their photographs taken.

Dr Mahathir's popularity is obvious and the students said his speech to them was inspiring. He seemed to have time for them despite his busy schedule. Jeng Yen and Irwan should learn from the Prime Minister - be humble, speak truthfully and sincerely, acquire knowledge to the fullest, and then help lead the nation to realise its aspirations under Vision 2020.

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