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Cyclist: Don't talk politics in foreign land

PUTRAJAYA, Wed: Don't talk politics, religion or discuss racial issues when in a foreign land or you will lose friends and a helping hand.

The locals will not want to know more of Malaysia and your quest to circle the globe on two wheels if they sense provocations, intrusive discussions and loose talk that could be insensitive to their culture, globe-trotting cyclist Hasan Nawawi Abd Rahman, 47, said.

He gave this advice to the press during his homecoming reception held by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishamuddin Hussein here today.

"However, I can personally say that 99% of the people we met across the globe are friendly and helpful, provided we don't touch on controversial issues.

"At times, we might even have to bend a little to be accepted," Hasan said when relating his experience with fellow Muslims in Iran.

He said the Shi'ite Iranians are always wary of Sunni Muslims and he was forced to say that his brother's name is "Hussein" and not "Ahmad" to win the confidence of his Iranian hosts.

"In Iran, the two most popular names are Hasan and Hussein. Since I am Hasan, I just say that my brother is Hussein.

"The names represent

two of the prophet's companions very much revered by them."

Hasan, who is former Port Dickson district officer, and his brother, Ahmad Ridhwan, 38, left Malaysia on Jan 4 last year to circle the globe on two wheels. They returned on Sunday.

Their 26,565km journey spanned 18 countries across three continents

and took up to nine weeks to cross the United States alone.

Mahathir spent half an hour with Hasan and Ahmad Ridhwan and gave the brothers a new Proton racing bike each and mementoes for their achievement.

The brothers' feat was also officially entered into the *Malaysia Book of Records*.