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Still waters run deep

Sharifah al-Attas

DATUK MOHD ZAIN ABDUL RASHID, 90, was Dr Mahathir's boyhood English teacher at S

"I stayed on Jalan Seberang Perak in Alor Star, near the wet market. So did Dr

As a young boy, he'd get to school by trishaw. Then, he learned to balance him

I taught English and History. The history that was taught was, of course, the

In those days, if a boy wished to try and find favour with his teacher, he'd s

If he weren't called on, he'd be silent. The other boys would sometimes wail,

I used to see him staggering under the weight of a bag full of books. I'd thin

In the evenings, the boys would gather their friends and play at spinning tops

In the old days, we had a subject known as Conversation. I'd stick a big pictu

Mahathir wouldn't say a word unless asked to. If the boy who answered got it r

Like many Malaysians, Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat TUN MOHAMED ZAHIR ISMAIL, 79,

"Dr Mahathir read; books - over and over. So as not to forget his English. Dur

I don't know why he didn't work with the Japanese and learn their language. I

When we returned to school, we were in the same class. But because he could re

One morning before class, he came to our form clutching the Straits Times, exc

We were all interested in politics, because we'd all experienced Japanese atro

When Mahathir burst into the classroom waving the Straits Times, we were alrea

When Mahathir told us Malaya would be a British colony, and the sultans relega

He may have been mistaken for a firebrand. But his way was quiet; even now, he

He could be humorous. He could crack jokes with the best of them. But quietly,

He's always been like that. And what he says is more important than how he say

He was worked up only when he had an argument - which wasn't very often.

He was passionately against Malayan Union. We'd argue about what should be don

The British introduced Malayan Union in 1946. We moved in the same circles, th

Daily, we'd cycle into Alor Star. That was a 3km trip. It took 45 minutes each

Our bicycles were old, and falling apart. During the Occupation, there wasn't

But then, we were young; we could take it.

Girls? No. He was such a quiet and earnest man. He'd read much of the time - a

He was extremely quiet and very determined. Very self-disciplined. He was punc

If assigned a task, he'd do it without hesitation; without excuses for not bei

When we both became MPs in 1964, we'd sometimes come to KL together to attend

He has gifts: a rapid understanding of issues and situations; a grasp of detai

We built a boat together, actually. We had free time and I bought the plans fr

It was agreed that he'd put together the body and I the engine. The instructio

We were already working: he was a doctor and had a house in Titi Gajah. I was

We were both married, and we went to Pulau Payar to fish. He didn't care for f

He has a facility for things mechanical. When I moved into Number 3, Jalan Tun

DR KOH ENG KHENG, Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah were members of the Class of

"Since H is close to K on the alphabet, and there weren't any Is or Js in our

We had to dissect them - but we had to catch them, first! We'd reach into a la

Siti Hasmah cringed at the thought of killing them, so I did it for her - skew

Dr Mahathir, unattached at the time, was a frequent visitor to our corner of t

He was a real gentleman, though - well-behaved, even-tempered; unobtrusive, qu

He was a friendly fellow, in spite of his later speeches `anti' this and that.

He loves cooking, and tells me he makes a mean mee goreng. As Prime Minister,

DATUK LIM PEE HUNG was in Standard 6 at Sultan Abdul Hamid College, when Dr Ma

"Our classrooms were next door to each other. I had only a nodding acquaintanc

Between 1953 and 1957, government medical officer Dr Mahathir was posted to La

When he was posted back to Alor Star from Langkawi, shortly before Independenc

I put a car at his disposal on trust; it took seven or eight months for his lo

He was a no-nonsense person, with others and with himself. Disciplined and abo

His private practice was popular. Often, he'd give out free medicines and cons
* The writer is Specialist Writer at the NST.