



A fresh angle every time from Dr M

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DRIVING FORCE: The PM trying out an electric car after the opening of Cyberjaya on July 8, 1999. With him is Multimedia Development Corporation executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah. — Reuters file picture

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AS a young reporter, I was simply *takut* to approach him but over time, I discovered that if you can muster the courage to talk to him, he doesn't disappoint. He will talk and he will always offer a fresh angle, a different dimension to the very same issue that everyone else would be talking about. It's as if he knows what is on the reporter's mind or what is needed to give a dash of excitement to a news story. In my early days, I used to ambush him a lot, especially in Parliament. I would wait, catch his eye and smile. Then, he would walk up to me and say "Apa dia?" I cannot remember the number of exclusive stories I got just by walking him to his car. Until today, his opening remarks at a Press conference or when he knows you are hoping to catch him

for a comment would be "Apa dia?" and "Apa nak tanya?" One of his most admirable traits is his willingness — even as head of government — to come down to your level. After he grew accustomed to my presence, he went through a period where he would greet me with a punch to the stomach. Often, this would happen in a crowd of people who would be startled by this. His bodyguards said that was his way of saying that he approved of me. Nevertheless, despite the show of familiarity on his part, Dr Mahathir was always the prime minister to me. I have never felt at ease enough to even crack a joke in his presence. Even when he invited me to sit with him on long flights abroad or when coming home, I could not forget — not for a second — that he is the leader of my country. There were two occasions when he was displeased with what I had written. When I pointed out that the error was in the heading and not in my story, he ignored the explanation. He sternly told me to be careful next time. I owe my 27 years in journalism to Dr Mahathir. When he was deputy prime minister, he took my calls and answered all my questions. Today, his views continue to guide me in my work as editor.

There is so much more the OIC can do now than it has been able to do in the past. Sadly, it has not come up to the expectations of the ummah.

— On the effectiveness of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, December 1997.

Of course, we would prefer to sell outside of Asean in hard currency and earn more foreign exchange. But where we can be competitive in each other's market, we should 'Buy Asean'.

— Offering his views on intra-Asean trade, December 1997.