

## **'How I covered the BMF scandal in the 1980s'**

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COMMENT Exposing the Bumiputra Malaysia Finance (BMF) scandal was the most exciting assignment I had while working as a journalist with the New Straits Times (NST) in the mid-80s.

The report by the three-person panel led by auditor-general Ahmad Noordin was released by the Finance Ministry in January 1985.

There was no cover-up or censorship of the auditor-general's report then. It gave a clear and closer perspective of the BMF loan scandal that embarrassed the government and the bank.

I covered the BMF scandal extensively in 1985 and 1986 because the late auditor-general Ahmad Noordin lived in the same Petaling Jaya neighbourhood as myself, opposite University Hospital.

Sometimes when I went to his office, if he was busy he would ask me to drop by his house in the evening for tea and goreng pisang (fried bananas).

An NST editor and mentor then, PC Shivadas, along with other editors, encouraged me to continue breaking the BMF stories because he knew about my personal contact, friendship and relationship with Ahmad Noordin.

Another senior editor told me when you have got a reliable source speaking to you, "Milk him well for your exclusive page one stories".

Reporting then was taken professionally and personally by some of us, the reporters, as the NST then competed with The Star for exclusives.

The competition was good and healthy because ultimately the public and readers benefitted from the breaking news with no holds barred from both newspapers at that time. The Star edged the NST then by nominating Ahmad Noordin as 'Man of the Year in 1986' and with some leading headline news on the BMF.

Those were the days when the NST and The Star both carried good BMF exclusives, and most of the time Ahmad Noordin was willing to be quoted, unlike government officials today who decline to comment. Their fear is that their ministers do not want them to be seen taking the limelight.

Then, the astute, transparent and forthright auditor-general would spend hours narrating the details of the BMF scandal. He related how the defunct Carrian group and its former chief executive, George Tan, schemed and operated to get the BMF bankers on his side to approve the loans.

"Tan would make a grand entrance at Hong Kong's plush hotel parties organised by him. Flanked with a bevy of gorgeous women at past midnight when most of the bank officials were drunk, he would clinch the deals," Ahmad Noordin told me.

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