

Outpouring of appreciation

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WHEN 988 deejay Chan Fong made Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the hot topic for the day in his interactive programme, *Gong Kai Fan Woon* (Rooster Rice Bowl), the voice-delay device was the least used equipment in the recording studio. (*Gong Kai Fan Woon* is aired weekdays from 6am to 9am.)

In fact, Chan never needed to touch the device – a gate-keeping gadget meant to screen off unsavoury comments from callers – even once during the entire programme this week.

"When we opened up the phone lines to the public to express their feelings about Dr Mahathir live on air, we didn't know what to expect.

"The voice-delay is our emergency button to make sure the things said are palatable. It does not mean the callers can only express praises, but we will not tolerate blatant rudeness or inflammatory remarks," said Chan.

As it turned out, Chan need not have worried as the comments were 100% compliments.

"This is a rare occurrence indeed. Usually, when we put up a topic for discussion, there will always be some callers giving positive remarks and others saying the opposite.

"But for Dr Mahathir's segment, all the callers had only good things to say about the premier, so much so that I was confident enough to allow the later calls through without screening them."

If there was a switch that Chan had to keep his finger on, it was the cut-off button because the deejay sometimes had to politely fade away some callers who tended to rattle on and not know when to stop.

Chan said the programme featuring Dr Mahathir was among his personal top 10 shows in his 11 years as a radio deejay; it

enjoyed overwhelming response from listeners.

"The station's three lines never stopped ringing throughout the programme. Unfortunately, I could only air a fraction of those calls due to time constraints," said Chan.

Listeners of all ages called in to express their feelings and pay tribute to Dr Mahathir for his two decades of exemplary leadership.

Some also shared anecdotes about their accidental meetings with the friendly Prime Minister and his family at shopping malls, parks and restaurants.

Chan said a male caller related how he had bumped into Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah, and their children and grandchildren at lunch in a restaurant one day.

"The man was so awed at seeing Dr Mahathir in person that he automatically stood up when the premier passed by his table.

"The man said he was delighted when Dr Mahathir, upon seeing him, nodded and smiled," said Chan.

A cameraman from a private TV station called to compliment Dr Mahathir for his easygoing manner. "Dr Mahathir is not arrogant to the working people. He would usually accommodate requests from the media to strike different poses," he said.

"But he sometimes scowled when reporters

asked irrelevant questions or expected him to reply to baseless rumours."

Callers who related their encounters with Dr Mahathir expressed how surprised they were that the premier could walk around town without a troop of bodyguards typically seen surrounding leaders of some other countries.

Chan himself recalled an encounter with the Prime Minister about 10 years ago while jogging at the Lake Gardens in Kuala Lumpur. "Dr Mahathir just sauntered by without a group of officers around him. I was so surprised to see him in such a common public place that I shouted 'Mahathir'. The premier nodded his head in acknowledgement when he heard me," said Chan.

Another caller told Chan about a Japanese friend, a professional, who so admired Dr Mahathir that he decided to make Malaysia his second home.

"The Japanese friend was impressed with Dr Mahathir's bravery in criticising the wrongdoings of the superpowers when leaders from other developing countries chose to keep silent," said Chan.

The deejay added that his Japanese brother-in-law told him that Dr Mahathir is a huge figure in Japan and the bookshops there stacked racks of the premier's books.

During the programme, Chan also received a call from a man who related Dr Mahathir's meeting with a group of top economists to

deliberate on the feasibility of pegging the ringgit at RM3.80 to the American dollar during the Asian economic crisis.

The man had heard about the encounter from his Economics lecturer who was present at the meeting.

It seemed most of the economists had objected to the pegging but Dr Mahathir pointed out that the move was crucial in providing local businessmen with a sound platform in an uncertain environment.

"The man said his lecturer admitted to eating humble pie today after it was proven that the pegging successfully helped to stabilise the currency during the crisis," said Chan.

Having heard so many of Dr Mahathir's positive traits and leadership qualities, Chan is inspired to improve on his personal development. For one, he aims to emulate the premier's ability to be frank even when the truth hurts.

"We tend to hide our true feelings or keep our mouth shut because we do not wish to rock the boat. But weaknesses will never get remedied if we sweep them under the carpet."

Chan also deeply admires Dr Mahathir's immense discipline to step down at the height of power.

"It is difficult to let go of power. I wish to acquire Dr Mahathir's willpower because it teaches one not to cling on to material wealth," said Chan.

He hoped Dr Mahathir would tune in to 988 and listen firsthand the outpouring of appreciation from radio listeners. The radio station has dedicated this week as a tribute to Dr Mahathir.

And if Dr Mahathir needs the assistance of a translator, Chan believes that will not be a problem at all.

"Many callers have expressed their desire to be with Dr Mahathir a little while longer to bid a fond farewell and wish God's blessings upon our beloved leader," said Chan.