

**Najib's Seri Perdana open house truly 'unforgettable'**  
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I tried to visit Najib Abdul Razak on the first day of Hari Raya Aidilfitri during the open house he hosted with his cabinet colleagues at Seri Perdana.

I had never before entered the house and thought the annual invitation gave me the best opportunity to inspect the prime minister's official residence that cost about RM200 million to build and renovate.

It wasn't something I had planned to do that day. It was at the back of my mind when I set out late morning in my car with my wife and a niece who was visiting us.

We went to the Selangor menteri besar's open house at the state secretariat building for an early lunch.

The MB was there with some of his Excos. He was busy obliging well-wishers by posing for photographs and distributing "duit Raya" to children.

Although the open house had just begun, there were 2,000 to 3,000 people there. Long queues had formed at three rows of food and drinks tables set up under large tents. A band was performing on a stage. Chairs were plentiful and misty cooling fans kept the temperature tolerable.

There were many wheelie bins for visitors to discard their paper plates and cups and other rubbish. Innovatively, some chairs were upended and plastic bags wrapped over the chair legs to act as additional plastic bins. I even saw a young man standing patiently in the crowd holding a large plastic bag for people to deposit their rubbish.

We next drove to Putrajaya to show my niece the landmark development which is now a popular tourist attraction. By the time we finished sight-seeing and picture-taking, it was about 3pm, and I was feeling a little hungry.

That's when we turned towards Seri Perdana – and encountered some unexpected experiences.

We were directed by policemen to park at a field about half a kilometre from the house, together with about 20 other cars. We walked with a small group of people to the house over a covered drain. The road was shady and the midday sun was mildly hot.

Suddenly, my wife slapped me on the arm. Then she punched me on the jaw. She had just smashed two mosquitoes, and they were large. An elderly woman in front of us began waving a piece of cloth around the head of a young girl.

From then on, I had to constantly brush my hands over the exposed parts of my body to keep the "kamikaze" mosquitoes at bay. They must have bred undisturbed in the drain.

Not many people were on the road. I was slightly annoyed to notice that the three open fields for cars to park nearer the house had many empty spaces in them. We could have parked much nearer and saved us the long walk.

At the bottom of the driveway leading up to the house, I saw a few hundred people heading up to or leaving the place. Many carried little white, square boxes that I assumed contained a souvenir. When we reached the top of the driveway, I was dismayed to find a long queue inching towards the house.

I was already sweating from the walk and decided not to stand among other sweating bodies for many minutes to enter the house. My wife and niece pressed on, and discovered a surprising outcome.

My wife told me later that a male voice on the public address system promised the visitors an

unforgettable experience. I wonder whether he would ever know how spot-on he was.

Najib's deputy Muhyiddin Yassin headed the receiving line by the time my wife and niece reached the end of the queue. Najib must have retired for a rest. After the handshake and greetings, they were each given one of the white boxes, and they followed the crowd further into the house.

Now, here comes the surprise. The crowd went in – and exited through another door near where they had earlier queued outside!

Nobody was around in the house to guide the crowd to the food tables. My wife heard somebody said food was available upstairs, but the flow of people pushed everyone out of the house.

In the meantime, I was leisurely exploring the grounds of the massive house. Hundreds of people were walking or standing around. Some sat on rocks or the kerb. There were no seats. A few people carried paper plates of food which they must have taken from inside the house. I saw a Milo and a Nescafe mini van, and joined the crowd at the Milo van. The crowd was orderly despite their obvious eagerness for the drink.

Disappointingly, by the time I reached the Milo man, he announced “habis, habis” and in an indifferent tone. I thought Milo had been serving free drinks at outdoor events for decades and should have known how much to prepare for each. It was not even 4pm and the Open House, which began at 1pm, was supposed to go on until 6pm.

I guessed many people, like my wife and niece, missed the food and drinks tables in the house and sought to quench their thirst at the Milo van.

Fortunately, I managed to get a cup of cold Nescafe, then looked for a while for somewhere to dispose of the cup before I saw three wheelie bins in a corner of the driveway.

While standing under a tree waiting for my wife and niece to emerge from the house, I estimated about a couple of thousand people in the grounds of the house.

A family going up the steep last stretch of the driveway to join the queue to enter the house caught my eye. A family member was having difficulty walking up on two crutches. The family decided to turn back.

Just then, an electric vehicle was descending from the house ferrying a group of young foreigners, who looked like West Asians, down the driveway.

We left the place several minutes after 4pm. The crowd on the driveway and road had thinned greatly. Most were leaving and few were arriving. The fields-turned-carparks were also emptying.

At the field where we parked, there were less than 10 cars remaining.

Inside the car, with the aircon running, we opened my wife's gift box to find a packet of 'telinga kecil' (little ear) biscuits – a crunchy, slightly salty biscuit popular among lower income and rural folk.

I smiled. I recalled Najib's predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who once declared he could hear the people very well because he had “big ears”. Abdullah, however, missed the sounds of unhappiness in early 2008.

Surely the choice of small ear biscuits was not made by Najib or his cabinet.

If not, then is someone else sending a coded message to Malaysians to speak louder and clearer because this government does not hear the people very well?

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