

Down Under in Najib's open house

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COMMENT I have never been to an 'open-house' before, so I really had no idea what to expect when I was told I would be going to the prime minister's open house for Hari Raya Adilfitri.

But to be honest I don't think a normal open house would have prepared me much.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 11I only come back to visit my paternal relatives in Malaysia for Chinese New Year, which falls over the Australian summer, so Ramadan on a whole was a new thing for me (I'm quite sad that those delicious food stalls outside the office will be gone).

Putrajaya was another first for me, the huge imposing dome buildings reminded me of a certain planet from Star Wars, and the equally imposing squat ministry buildings are exactly the way I pictured the Ministry of Truth when reading George Orwell's '1984'.

Despite what Google and The Star's editorial on Wednesday said about Hari Raya being a time for all Malaysians to celebrate, I arrived at Seri Perdana expecting to find an extremely Malay-centric event.

However, I was pleasantly surprised to be wrong on that account, the event was truly open and inclusive and the Chinese and the Indians embraced the celebrations as much as the Malays.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 10I loitered around for about an hour watching people take photos in front of various things in the ridiculously lavish house, gem-stone encrusted picture frames of Rosmah Mansor hung on the walls and the huge portraits of Najib Abdul Razak gave the whole place a royal feel.

Back home, our PM doesn't try to give off the impression of royalty, and I doubt you would find life-sized portraits of any leader at the official residence.

When Najib arrived, he stood in the lobby along with a line of his ministers to shake the hands of all those who had patiently lined up to meet him and have the house briefly "opened" to them (they were allowed to walk in through the front door and were quickly led across the lobby and out the back door).

I couldn't help but feel that this served as a kind of medieval pity on the common folks, one day a year they could line up for hours to catch a glimpse of what is impossible for them to have, to see how their rulers live, before being given a small package of cookies and a mug.

A medieval pity that was passed off as humbling show of Najib as a kind ruler who takes the time to share with all his subjects.

Somewhere, someone announced there were 100,000 people waiting to shake hands with the PM. I got a few photos of Najib looking tired with the repetition, and ducked out to go find the food.

Down in the grounds there was a festive atmosphere, colourful "1Malaysia" balloons filled huge tents where thousands of people sat on plastic chairs eating and watching a giant screen with a projected live image of Najib looking increasingly bored.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 06When I asked why they had come, quite a few were happy to admit that it was for the food, some said they hadn't bothered to go into the house because the line was too long.

I was kind of confused by it all, because don't get me wrong the food was good, but it just seemed like a long way to drive for a free meal.

When I got back to the house Najib had disappeared, leaving other ministers to shake hands with the people.

Later watching Najib drive a golf buggy while waving to the crowd, it brought back memories of George Bush on a golf course.

Then, a man ran towards Najib, yelling "I love you, PM" but was pushed away by the security entourage.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 05After watching Najib cut a 100kg cake with a massive samurai sword on stage in front of thousands who at the MC's prompting pumped their fists in the air yelling "Satu Malaysia" and "Malaysia Boleh"

Coming from Australia and being exposed to a more sober blend of politics, I couldn't help but wonder if this man was a rock-star or a politician? A charitable royal or an elected representative of the people? A god or a policy maker?

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