

## **Are Malaysian Taxpayers Funding Najib's Frivolous Overseas Events?**

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The YouTube download which went viral shows Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak being humiliated by Bersih supporters at an event in London; but what you do not know is how much the Malaysian taxpayer had to pay for that, and other extravagant events in London.

On 14 May, Najib was heckled by Bersih supporters at the London O2 Arena, commonly known as The Dome.

In Malaysia, it was easy for Najib to ignore Bersih when 250,000 people thronged the streets of KL on 28 April, to demand free and fair elections. Najib fled to Sarawak. He abrogated responsibility and the police unleashed tear-gas and water cannon on the Bersih supporters.

A fortnight later, Najib, accompanied by the self-styled "First Lady", Rosmah Mansor, probably felt they could avoid further reference to Bersih when they were in London, on the first leg of their official European and American visit.

He was wrong.

That is why we have a new record to add to our "best democracy in the world" and "first-class education": The latest addition is for the first Malaysian Prime minister to be heckled during a speech, in London.

In the video clip, there were titters of laughter at the back of the hall, at the PM's predicament.

Obviously, freedom of expression has a paralysing effect on some people; Najib's Special Branch personnel and the High Commission staff were stunned into inaction. It was several minutes before they reacted and expelled the Bersih supporters from the premises.

If the PM felt humiliated and angry, he has only himself to blame. He could have, in the past, censured Umno supporters and sympathisers who have heckled and caused havoc at ceramahs organised by social activists, human rights defenders, the opposition and ordinary people.

He failed to criticise the various people who intimidated Bersih's Ambiga, who arranged a mock-funeral of the Penang Chief minister and who attacked students in Dataran Merdeka.

Did anyone sympathise with Najib? No. What is good for the goose, should be good for the gander.

When Najib was in London, he was the guest of honour at the event organised by the Malaysian High Commissioner, Zakaria Sulong at The Dome. The event promised an evening for Malaysians to mix and mingle with the PM and be fêted with food, drink and cultural performances. Students were provided with return travel from various universities, throughout Britain.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves if the event was necessary.

The PM did not stay and interact with the students because he rushed off for dinner at the launch of a new Malaysian restaurant in Paddington.

Whilst Najib was wooed by over 50 Malaysian businessmen and bankers in the comfortable surroundings

of the restaurant, 500 Malaysians and students were probably cursing themselves for bothering to attend an event from which the guest of "honour" was absent.

Najib and his 16 member entourage had a proper sit-down meal but Malaysians in The Dome endured a cold buffet of sandwiches and spring rolls. So much for Najib's motto of "People First, Performance Now".

The frivolous event of "An Evening with the PM" was a public relations disaster. Malaysians must condemn the breach of privacy which occurred when their photographs were taken by the Special Branch and their particulars recorded.

Why invite people to an event and then photograph them? Does he really need to intimidate the rakyat in this way?

Malaysians must also demand to know the total cost, including return transportation, food, entertainment, and gowns for the participants, security detail and hire of The Dome.

If the Malaysian taxpayer thought this was just a one-off, he is wrong. There were at least two events in three weeks all funded by the Malaysian taxpayer. Were Malaysians even aware?

On 25 April, the Islamic Fashion Festival (IFF) held their fashion show and charity gala dinner, in London. One of the key sponsors was Malaysia Tourism which hired the Natural History Museum to show the latest Islamic fashion creations.

At the IFF event, Malaysia's self-styled "First Lady" Rosmah Mansor accompanied the newly crowned First Lady, the Raja Permaisuri Agung to her first foreign engagement. South East Asian and European royalty attended, with many British and Malaysian guests.

The opulent interior of the Natural History Museum was transformed into a magical setting where the guests could watch the models sashay on the catwalk.

So how much did Tourism Malaysia have to pay for this extravaganza? The hire of the museum, the transformation from museum to catwalk and dining venue, the dinner, the catering staff, the catwalk, the models, the security, the fee for celebrities?

How did it benefit the Malaysian public? What is the return of the investment for the Malaysian taxpayer?

The Tourism Malaysia website states that the recipients of the funds raised during the Charity Gala Dinner are The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award and The Wessex Youth Trust, both of which focuses on children and young people.

These are UK based charities. Malaysia's poor will not see any of the funds raised from charity auctions during the dinner.

On 11 May, Tourism Minister Ng Yen Yen said that the Bersih 3.0 rally held in Kuala Lumpur had "dire consequences on the tourism industry, resulting in the last-minute cancellation of tour packages and hotel reservations".

Yen Yen may allude to money being lost through cancellations but what about the money that is spent on frivolous events in London, away from the scrutiny of the Malaysian taxpayer.

By all means, have the charity gala dinner but if Tourism Malaysia would like to sponsor the event, how much did they pay and why was no provision made for Malaysian charities?

The rakyat needs to ask how much of the Malaysian taxpayer's money is wasted on events in London, New York, states in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Australia and maybe Spain.

What is the point of asking Malaysians to tighten their belts when the PM, his spouse, our ministries and foreign diplomatic missions flush our money away?

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