

[Syed Nadzri on Tuesday: Coming home impressed by Japanese culture, discipline](#)

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IT was 2pm on Monday last week. A small group of Malaysians was waiting in the side lobby of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo for the arrival of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was starting his six-day working visit to Japan.

The hotel, which is near the fashionable Ginza area, is forever busy. It is also huge, and is a favourite with leaders and celebrities. That's why I suppose they created two or three special side-doors for VIPs to use to avoid the buzz at the main entrance.

Anyway, just about then, a small convoy of limousines arrived. It was not Abdullah who stepped out but Lee Kuan Yew.

"Oh, so our Prime Minister is sharing the same hotel with the Singapore Minister Mentor," I thought to myself.

"What an interesting situation considering the unending saga of Malaysia-Singapore relations. If they do bump into each other, it would be the first time top leaders from both sides come face to face since Malaysia scrapped plans to build a bridge on its half of the Johor Strait to replace the Causeway."

Hardly had the thrill died down when someone from the Malaysian Embassy said: "By the way, Tun will also be staying here when he arrives the day after." Tun is, of course, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who has been critical of the Government's decision to scrap the bridge project. Like Abdullah and Lee, he was taking part in the annual Nikkei conference.

So we were going to have three central characters under the same roof. What a prospect. But Imperial Tokyo is so big with more than 1,000 rooms and 69 suites in its two tower blocks that even VIPs can become "invisible" once they are inside.

Four years ago, for instance, Bill Clinton and Dr Mahathir were there at the same time, but they ended up not meeting each other despite interest expressed by the former United States president. But this time, as it turned out, there was no need for chance encounters because although there was no meeting involving all three, Abdullah did meet Lee and Dr Mahathir separately. There were certainly no controversial discussions. According to the Prime Minister, he and Lee only spoke about the lectures they were delivering at the Nikkei conference. His call on Dr Mahathir on Friday morning was just to say "hello".

Just the day before, a colleague and I went to see Dr Mahathir in his suite. We were lucky he could spare some time because he was about to leave for an engagement. The former Prime Minister spoke at length about current issues but all was off the record. Interesting. Abdullah's main purpose in visiting Japan this time was firstly to give two important lectures.

One was at the Nikkei conference where he spoke about the future of East Asia as a community. The other was at the United Nations University, where he again became chief ambassador of Islam Hadhari, at the same time helping to build bridges between Islam and the

West. Official business and investment matters also featured prominently because it could be seen on a couple of occasions that Japanese businessmen were waiting to see him. During a chat with Malaysian journalists on Wednesday, Abdullah, like most Malaysians when in Japan, spoke about Japanese culture and discipline.

"Cleanliness is a way of life for them," he said.

"Look at their vehicles. They don't emit smoke at all.

"Some of the people walk with surgical masks on their faces when they have a cold as they don't want to spread it to others. And of course, their toilets... We've been trying for so long to emulate them, but it doesn't seem to catch on in Malaysia."

Source: www.nst.com.my