

SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 2009

## Singapore Prime Minister holidaying in Cambodia



(Wiki Photo). On Thursday four of us Singaporeans bumped into the Singapore Prime Minister at Khmer Ceramics. We were there for a look-see and were surprised to see Mr Lee Hsien Loong in the small shop. He was there with his wife and a young man whom my dad reckons is his son.

(We have never seen photos of his son in the papers so have no clue what he looks like. Mrs Lee, or Ms Ho Ching, was until recently, the head of [Temasek Holdings](#), which owns and manages the Singapore government's direct investments, both locally and overseas. So we all know what Mrs Lee looks like.)

Because I did not actually see the PM's wife, I had assumed the young man was a civil servant. I have many friends who work in the civil service, even a cousin, and they tell me how they have to facilitate or accompany ministers on their trips.

I was the first to see the PM as I was leading the way into Khmer Ceramics and he looked up as I was saying something to my dad. Must have been the Singaporean accent. Anyway, I saw him and it was weird. My first thought was "He looks exactly like on TV". I imagine this is what it is like to see say, Brad Pitt, in person. Surreal. Someone you only ever see on telly and then you see him in the flesh and he looks exactly the same.

We were all surprised to see the PM because there was no security to be seen, no bodyguards. Just a new, white tourist van parked outside. I saw Serge, the owner of Khmer Ceramics and said to him, "Singapore's Prime Minister", because I don't assume everyone knows what he looks like. Serge said, "I know, Richard (must be the guide or attendant) told me. But today he says he is not Prime Minister..."

I found him very nice and humble and later Serge said to me he thought Mr Lee to be very humble and polite too. I mentioned I'm Singaporean living in Siem Reap and was a little surprised there was no interest from him on what I was doing in Siem Reap. Usually I find Singaporeans very interested to know what their compatriot is doing in another country.

My friend thought Mr Lee was "socially awkward". May very well be true, he may be a typical shy, introverted person. We were laughing that I should have handed out the Bloom name card (I don't carry name cards with me - very un-Asian) and invited him to the Bloom shop. I laughed because I could just imagine it: just like Tea Club, a Malaysian restaurant in Phnom Penh that struck gold with Malaysian customers after a visit by then Malaysian PM Mohamad Mahathir.