

THE STAR

DATE: 07/08/2007

Tunku the leader and matchmaker

The Star - 7/8/2007
He was the man who helped cook find love

By **CHRISTINA CHIN**
sgchris@thestar.com.my

PENANG: To his cook, Tunku Abdul Rahman was more than the country's first prime minister. He was the man who helped her find her true love.

Salmiah Mat Isa, 56, was only 16 when she was hired as a cook in the Tunku's household in 1968.

"My mother-in-law was his cleaner. One day, Tunku asked me casually: 'Hang nak kahwin ka? Aku boleh kenalkan (Would you like to get married? I can introduce someone).' The rest, as they say, is history," she said, adding that the Tunku even threw her a *kenduri* to celebrate the wedding.

"Tunku was such a kind man - not fussy at all. But the one thing he hated was when people lied. Sometimes, he would request I cook a particular dish and when I forgot, he would ask why. I knew that if I lied I would get into more

trouble, so I was always honest," she said, adding that the Tunku would sometimes do the marketing and cook the dishes himself.

"When he felt like having noodles, he would go out and buy the ingredients and ask me to be his 'kitchen helper'. He would do the cooking himself.

"Tunku's favourite dishes were my *kari ikan* (curry fish), *sambal belacan*, *ikan kering* (salted fish) and *ulam* - that was part of his daily lunch menu. If I missed out one dish, he would get annoyed.

"His lunch and dinner were simple - *roti bakar* (toast) with cheese and tea with milk and honey in the morning and chicken soup and coffee at night. He never ate rice for dinner," she said.

Miah, as the Tunku fondly called her, cited a handbag from him as one of her most prized possessions.

"He always bought his staff gifts wherever he went. When Tunku was in

Jeddah for six months, I was among several who went with him. That was when I took the opportunity to perform the *haj*.

"He even took us along when he went to England," she said, her voice cracking up as she proudly showed a picture of the Tunku and his staff in Jeddah.

Salmiah, who currently resides in Kuala Lumpur, was in town for a nostalgic get-together of Tunku's former employees at the Penang International Sports Arena yesterday.

Also present at the event organised by the Information Ministry were Tunku's former ADCs Owen Chung, 74, and Samad Mokhtar, 76, and driver R. Kalimuthu, 82.

All four former employees agreed on two things, that Tunku was a generous man who treated his workers like family and that he would be very proud of the country's achievements if he were alive today.