

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	15 MARCH 2015

A walk down memory lane

TAKING A BREAK: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak does a workout in Lake Gardens and shares memories of days gone by, writes Ahmad Kamal Abu Bakar

KUALA LUMPUR

It started out as just another regular Sunday morning at the Nasi Lemak Tanglin stall in Lake Gardens here. Joggers joined the breakfast crowd, forming a bubbly queue eager to partake in their savoury breakfast.

As the buskers plugged their instruments into small amplifiers and the line moved slowly towards the food counter, I found myself sitting alone at a table anxiously waiting for my guest to arrive.

"We've been waiting for 20 minutes," said a woman with a group of people seated next to my table. I realised later that they were waiting for the buskers, not my guest. The buskers must be really good, I thought.

NS7-15/3/2015

My guest arrived 10 minutes later. Stepping out of the car, he joined the famous Nasi Lemak Tanglin queue. The crowd greeted him like a celebrity. Cameras flashed while greetings, handshakes and smiles were exchanged. "We're your Facebook friends!" exclaimed an excited woman as she pointed to her smiling friends seated at a table.

Upon choosing what he wanted for his post-exercise meal, he walked to my table and sat down. "How are you?" he began after I introduced myself. The crowd began to circle our table, requesting to be photographed with the unexpected guest. He nodded and smiled at every click of the cameras.

"How was your exercise, Datuk

Seri?" I asked my guest, the prime minister of Malaysia, as he sat facing me, his eyes still wandering around Kompleks Makan Tanglin.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak was clad in white and blue sports attire, matched with a pair of white running shoes.

"It was good," he said. "I had a good one-hour workout."

I nodded, and asked if he had lost a bit of weight. Without hesitation, he proudly proclaimed that he had lost three inches around his waist.

I had to admit, he did look good for a busy 61-year-old man. Despite his hectic schedule, he tries to exercise three times a week.

On that Sunday morning, he had chosen to do his walkabout at Lake Gardens, where we could exercise, meet the public and, later, have a brisk walk down memory lane.

For most of us, Nasi Lemak Tan-

glin is just another breakfast meal, but for the older KL folks, it is an institution with a long history.

From its humble beginnings as a lone stall under a cherry tree in Jalan Tanglin, the business has grown into what it is today. Some time ago, they even opened an outlet in Bangsar's posh Jalan Telawi.

Najib grew up not far from that cherry tree. He, too, was one of its regular clients.

From Bangunan Sri Taman, the official residence of his late father, former prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, he would regularly ride his bicycle to the cherry tree to get a packet of his favourite nasi lemak.

"I was more adventurous than my kids," he said, sharing his fond memories from those early days.

Zainal Abidin, the owner of Nasi Lemak Tanglin, sat next to him and they exchanged stories

of days gone by.

"Back then, a packet of nasi lemak was only 30 sen," the prime minister chuckled. I guess it was that long ago.

He even remembered the lady who ran the cherry tree stall, from her luxurious long hair to her generous smile.

That lady was Zainal Abidin's late mother, who had passed on the family recipe to him.

His daughter is now the third generation of the Nasi Lemak Tanglin dynasty, and she will continue its long tradition of serving one of the best nasi lemak in town.

As the buskers began playing, the prime minister shifted his attention from his plate to the music. "They're good," he commented, and what he said next totally surprised me.

"I wonder if they know any Bruno Mars songs," he said.

It was probably a memorable day for the buskers when they played two Bruno Mars songs back to back, as requested by the prime minister himself.

He then requested another song, which even I, a man in his early 40s, have never heard of.

"Oh well," he sighed, and later laughed when the two young buskers told him that they didn't have that particular song in their iPad. Mine neither, to be honest.

From then on, we talked music for a while. I asked if he, while being a student abroad, liked rock bands such as the Beatles or the Rolling Stones.

"Not so much," he professed, and went on to mention some of his favourites, from Harry Belafonte, the Bee Gees, Lionel Richie and on to Rod Stewart.

"I've actually met Lionel Richie. Really nice guy," he quipped.

"Do you like Michael Jackson, sir?" asked a man who had been listening to our conversation from the beginning.

"I liked the Jackson 5, but I think Michael was ... odd," he quipped. We all laughed.

The prime minister was absolutely chirpy throughout the short session, either from the endorphins of his morning exercise, or the deluge of memories that kept coming the longer we sat there.

When he decided to take a walk with Zainal Abidin to the original spot at the cherry tree, and later enthusiastically shared again with everybody stories from his earlier years, I found my answer.

Here was a man engulfed in sweet and spicy nostalgia.



Datuk Seri Najib Razak queuing up to savour a taste of his youth, the famed Nasi Lemak Tanglin, in Kuala Lumpur recently.



Datuk Seri Najib Razak meeting with early morning joggers during his exercise session at Lake Gardens, recently.