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Grab a chance to feast like Tunku

First prime minister's cook will prepare lunch for 45 lucky readers

By SUZANNE LAZAROO
suzanne@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Lunch as how Tunku Abdul Rahman himself would have enjoyed it – that's on the table for a one-day-only lunch prepared by his former cook, Salmiah Mat Isa.

Star Media Group will host the special lunch as part of the 45th birthday celebrations of *The Star*, as well as to celebrate the country's 59th Merdeka.

The lunch will be held on Aug 30, at the company's headquarters, Menara Star in Phileo Damansara 2, with 45 lucky readers standing a chance to snap up the limited places.

To make sure winners arrive unflustered by traffic jams and parking woes, ride-sharing app Grab will be sponsoring 45 return trips for the winners from the Klang Valley; all they have to do is book their rides on the Grab app and key in a code.

Tunku was Malaysia's first Prime Minister, serving until his retirement in 1970.

Affectionately known as Mak Cik Salmiah, his former cook worked for Tunku from 1968 – when she was all of 16 years old – till his death in 1990.

Initially employed as his children's nanny, she also helped his previous cook in the kitchen, and took over in 1971 when the cook retired.

"At the start, I didn't know how to



cook very well, but Tunku said that he had simple tastes and I could learn the previous cook's recipes," said Mak Cik Salmiah, who said she earned Tunku's nod quickly.

She said when he did not have guests over, Tunku preferred to eat his rice and dishes with his hand.

Visibly moved at her memories of Tunku, she recalls him as a kind, approachable figure who treated his staff like family.

"He really took care of all of us, and our families," she said.

"He treated everyone with the same kindness. When I gave birth to my third child, it was Raya time ... he sent his driver to fetch me and my whole family to celebrate at his house. I even followed him and his wife on official visits abroad, before I got married."

Mak Cik Salmiah, 65, remembers Tunku's favourite dishes well.

"He had to have a curry every day, and fish curry was his favourite. He would request it every time he had guests," she said.

For the special lunch event, she will be preparing some of his local favourites, in homage to Merdeka celebrations.



Fond memories: Mak Cik Salmiah pointing at an old photo of her in a group shot with Tunku.

These include the fish curry, of course – a *kari ikan senangin* – along with *sambal tumis sotong* (squid sambal), spice-fried chicken, tamarind-saffron prawns and mutton *rendang*.

For the sake of authenticity, spice blends and chilli levels will be adjusted according to Tunku's preference – such as with her special *sambal belacan*, which is extra

pedas (spicy).

After Tunku's death, Mak Cik Salmiah continued in the employ of his wife, Tun Sharifah Rodziah Syed Alwi Barakbah, till she passed on in 2000.

During her tenure with Tunku, Mak Cik Salmiah also cooked for the board of directors and management of *The Star* from 1993, when the company was renting the

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Tunku's Batu Ferringhi bungalow in Penang – and she has long been regarded as an institution in the company.

So in 2007, when *The Star* took over Tunku's bungalow in Bukit Tunku, Kuala Lumpur, it was only fitting that Mak Cik Salmiah hold court in its kitchen; in 2011, she transferred over to Menara Star, where she is still employed till today, along with husband Razak Ahmad, 76.

Together, they prepare meals for the board of directors, company events, meetings and clients.

To win a seat at Tunku's special lunch, go to contests.thestar.com.my/atasteofnostalgia/ and state what you love about Malaysia, from now until 11.59pm, Aug 17.

The Star turns 45 on Sept 9.

To get the recipes for some of Tunku's favourite dishes, go to kuali.com from Aug 22 onwards,