



Culinary inspirations

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ONCE in a while, I would prepare a breakfast of eggs and toast for my husband, Shafee. I would ask him how he wanted his eggs done - half-boiled, poached, mata lembu, scrambled or a simple omelette, perhaps - nothing fancy! Humdrum and everyday stuff!

More often than not, his request would be for eggs 'style Tunku'. Egg Tunku style is a dish that I got from the cookbook, *Favourite Dishes from the Tunku's Kitchen*, a collection of family recipes and favourite dishes of Tunku Abdul Rahman, which was collated and published by the team of Federal Hotels International and The Federal Hotel Kuala Lumpur, in 2005.

The Federal Hotel Kuala Lumpur holds a significant place in the city's history, and was one of the first international-standard hotels in Malaysia. It opened its doors to guests in August 1957, just in time to welcome guests and participants to Malaysia's first Merdeka Day celebration, which marked Malaysia's independence from British colonial rule.

In this cookbook, all the recipes were selected, tried and tested by Tunku's daughter, the late Y.T.M Tunku Datin Paduka Khadijah and her cousin, the late Y.T.M Dato Hajah Tunku Mukminah YTM Tunku Mohd Jiwa. In the introduction of the book, it was written that Tunku loved to eat, 'loved good food and was an expert in the kitchen.'

One of the dishes that caught my eye was 'eggs in tomato sauce' - a rather unusual combination, I thought to myself. So, I decided to try it. It was a very simple breakfast dish and quick to make.

We are bound to have all the

The writer and the late Tunku on his 87th birthday on 3 February 1990 - Photos: KALSOM TAIB

Remembering Tunku

As we celebrate Merdeka this week, the writer shares her admiration of Tunku Abdul Rahman, and her family's favourite Tunku recipe.

ingredients in the kitchen - cooking oil, shallots, chilli paste, tomato sauce, sugar, salt, onion, eggs and fresh red and green chillies.

One morning I decided to serve this dish for our breakfast with some 'designer' bread - not the usual bread but the slightly more expensive bread from a shop that specialises only in bread and pastries.

It was different from our usual fare and Shafee enjoyed it so much. He gave me an 'A'. He likes to give me a grade for any dish I cooked for him. When I started to learn how to cook bubur kacang, his favourite dessert, I had to try and try, scoring a 'D' when I first started, and then my grade went up to 'C', then 'B'. It took me months before I scored an 'A' for my bubur kacang.

To be honest, cooking has never been my forte for the most part of my marriage, so these little cooking initiatives

which I do in my twilight years do give me a bit of a thrill.

The dishes in the book

reflect the man Tunku was. The food that he enjoyed revealed a man who appreciated the simple things in life. Growing up in Kedah he naturally preferred masakan utara or the Northern styles of cooking - fish curry, filed cabbage, jering sambal, yam stalks in tamarind gravy.

He was also fond of Thai cuisine as his mother was from Thailand - Thai chicken curry, chicken in spicy Thai paste, Thai tamarind sauce.

He also enjoyed Western food, having spent several years in London. There is a chapter in the book on Western dishes - cream of mushroom soup, lamb chops with parsley butter, roasted prime beef with Yorkshire pudding and sole fish in lemon butter sauce to name a few.

I was also informed by Sharmila Vella, Impiana Hotel's Marketing Communication Manager and the granddaughter of one of Tunku's former neighbours in Alor Star, Srinivasan Chettiar, that Tunku also loved Indian food, especially idili and tosai with tomato chutney. Sharmila's grandmother would often cook these dishes for the Tunku.

Tunku did not only love good food but he also loved cooking. He could have picked up his cooking skills during his London days. I am sure my father, Taib Andak, and Tun Abdul Razak would have tasted his cooking as they were all law students together in London from 1946 to 1949. Tunku studied at the Inner Temple, Tun Abdul Razak at Lincoln's Inn and my father at the Middle Temple. They were all good friends, despite their age differences, with Tunku being the oldest of the three.

There was a thirteen-year gap between him and my father and six years apart between my father and Tun. My father was then 31 and Tun was 25. The age difference did not seem to matter to them. My father already had four children then, and had left my mother and all of us behind in Muar, Johor to focus on his studies.

Upon completion of his law degree, Tunku returned to Malaya in January 1949, whilst my father was called to the bar on 29 June 1949 and Tun, on 4 May 1950, although he had passed his finals to become a barrister in less than

eighteen months.

Tunku Abdul Rahman became the country's first Prime Minister shortly after Merdeka. I witnessed the two Merdeka events in 1957 - at midnight on 30 August at the Selangor Club padang when the Union Jack flag was lowered and the Federation of Malaya flag was hoisted, at the stroke of midnight and the very next day the constitutional documents of the transfer of sovereignty was handed to the Tunku by the Duke of Gloucester, the Queen's representative. Tunku then read out the Proclamation of Independence and cried out "Merdeka" very loudly, seven times.

That was the day my fondness and admiration of Tunku Abdul Rahman began. As our first Prime Minister, Tunku is best remembered as Bapa Kemerdekaan, having achieved independence for Malaya through negotiations and constitutional means and thereafter as Bapa Malaysia with the formation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963.

A man of many admirable traits and qualities, Tunku was humble, honest, principled, wise, and fair and blessed with a sense of humour. He was a man of integrity and ethics, and cared for his fellow men, irrespective of origin, rank, status, race or religion. He also cared deeply for the underprivileged.

A simple and straightforward man, Tunku was direct in communicating his intentions and opinions, and never used slogans, campaigns or the media to boost his image. He was a man who respected and upheld the rule of law, and did not interfere in the enforcement or handling of matters by the legal institutions.

I was part of a group of ladies under the National Council of Women's Organizations Malaysia (NCWO) who attended an event to mark Tunku's 87th birthday on 3 February 1990. Tunku showed so much humility and despite his past position and leadership achievements, Tunku made all his guests feel so special by being attentive and grounded.

He was a true gentleman, kind and astute and still so sharp at his age. He passed away the same year in Kuala Lumpur General Hospital on 6 December. Al Fatihah.

Tunku was a great leader, loved and respected by Malaysians and all who have had the privilege of knowing him.

I am sharing Tunku's recipe, Fried Eggs in Tomato Sauce, courtesy of Tunku Khadijah who, allowed me to include the recipe in my latest book, *Recipes are for Sharing*, before she passed away last year. She informed me that this was one of her late father's special breakfast dishes - a very simple dish for a very humble yet amazing and inspiring man.

Fried Eggs in Tomato Sauce

(Serves 4)
2 tbsp Oil
4 eggs
3 shallots, peeled and finely pounded
1 tbsp chilli puree or chilli sauce
2 tbsp tomato sauce
sugar and salt to taste
1 onion, peeled and finely cut into rings
1 green chilli, cut diagonally
1 red chilli, cut diagonally

Method

1. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the eggs sunny side up. Set aside.
2. In the same pan, saute the shallots until fragrant.
3. Add the chilli puree or chilli sauce. Fry until the oil surfaces.
4. Add the tomato sauce, and sugar and salt to taste.
5. Add the onion rings and cook for a minute.
6. Then add the fried eggs.
7. Garnish with the sliced green and red chillies before serving.

You can also add sliced tomatoes and chopped spring onions. It is delicious with toast.



One of Tunku's favourite breakfast dishes, Telur Goreng dalam Sos Tomato.