

Waiter Glad To Serve Five Prime Ministers

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By Fatin Nabihah Marzuki

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- Who would imagine a waiter could serve food for five Malaysian prime ministers?

Mohan Narayanan, 57, has had that privilege and he is still working at one of the oldest restaurants here, Coliseum Cafe in bustling Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, where he started at age 15.

"No word can describe how please I am to have met and served food for the country's most powerful people like Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi," he told Bernama.

Mohan, who is fondly known as Captain Morgan at his workplace, has 42 years of experience in the food and beverage line and can speak five languages - Malay, English, Cantonese, Hainanese and Tamil.

"I still remember those days when Tunku Abdul Rahman came here with his friends and ordered Hailam Noodles, which is our very own signature dish.

"And as far as I can remember, Tun Hussein Onn's favourite was Fish and Chips while his wife's (Toh Puan Suhaila) was Baked Crabmeat," said Morgan, adding that Tun Hussein's favourite spot was table No. 14.

He noted that all the five former prime ministers had one thing in common - they loved Coliseum's Sizzling Steak, their must-have food.

He said Abdullah was still patronising the restaurant today although he was no longer in office.

"Each year, even until now, it is like a tradition for him and his family to come here to celebrate Mother's Day, and it is such a must for him to sit at the same spot since the days he was prime minister," he smiled, reminiscing the moments.

Morgan's ability in remembering more than 200 dishes and drinks on the menu shows how passionate he is about his job.

"Three generations of my family have worked here - my grandfather, father and I. So how am I to retire from this job?," said Morgan, who still looks energetic.

The building that houses the iconic cafe still stands steadily since 1921 in Batu Road, renamed Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman in 1960, after the country's first Yang di-Pertuan Agong or King.

Stepping into the building gives one the feel or nostalgia of a bygone era, with the scent of vintage wooden furniture, old ceiling fans, plain white tablecloths and dim yellow lighting flushing across the cafe.

Celebrating its 94th anniversary this year, Coliseum Cafe back then was the the most famous dining spot for British colonisers, government officers, planters, tin miners, traders and others.

Coliseum Cafe's chief executive director, Low Ching Hoe said the cafe's furniture including the tables, chairs, coat hangers and the bar section were all in their original places and it was the numero uno factor why the cafe still had its own loyal customers.

"Despite the mushrooming of new cafes nowadays, our competitors are not something we have to worry about because we know that we are serving Western- Hainanese cuisine together with the nostalgic memories for each person who comes here. That's the most important thing for us," he said with a smile.

Low said back then the cafe was operated together with the hotel located above the cafe but it was no longer in operation.

Built before the Second World War, this historic cafe was founded by a group of Hainanese business people who brought their own style of cooking but localised it with Malay, Chinese and Indian spices.

The cafe has maintained its signature dishes such as Hainanese Chicken Chop, Oxtail Soup and more, while its in-house bread and kaya (coconut-egg custard) are popular staples.

"Most of our regular customers said the taste of our dishes has remained the same since back in the old days," said Low.

Being a place with umpteen anecdotes, especially among the 'old Malaya' generation, most of the elderly patrons will bring their children and grandchildren to the cafe to enjoy the food and ambience while recalling their love stories, war-time experiences, how they lived their live during the colonial era and so on.

In 2013, Coliseum Cafe was recognised as the 'Longest Operating Western Colonial-Themed Restaurant' in the Malaysia Book of Records.

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