

Tunku Azizah, homemaker extraordinaire

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KUANTAN, July 29 (Bernama) -- The Raja Permaisuri Agong, Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah, reigns on the household front.

According to an Istana Abdulaziz maid, Norzila Ismail, Tunku Azizah personally sews all the *songket samping* (attire worn with Baju Melayu) of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah.

“Her Majesty stitches them by hand and ensures that they are meticulously sewn. She takes great pride in her work and if she is not satisfied with the results, she would unstitch her sewing and do it all over again,” said the maid.

Norzila, 53, who hails from Besut, Terengganu, started serving the royal household in 1988. In addition to managing Tunku Azizah’s wardrobe, Norzila assists in several other palace duties.

Relating her experience at Istana Abdulaziz, Norzila said she had made several blunders while performing her duties, among them causing the colours to run while washing certain fabrics, ruining a scarf when ironing and breaking an unopened container of cosmetic powder bought overseas.

“Her Majesty had just returned from London and I was helping her to unpack. She had reminded me to handle the items with care but, minutes later, I stumbled and the container of powder fell to the ground.

Tunku Azizah let me off by saying, “I just told you to be careful!” .



“She will not get mad as long as you admit your mistakes. The same goes when someone breaks a crockery item. We have to inform and show her the item as she wants us to be responsible and not keep quiet about it.

According to Norzila, Tunku Azizah is aware of every item, including files in the palace office, because she is meticulous. The staff would have to wait for her instructions on the use of items at any ceremony.

Another palace staff, Salmiah Ismail, said she missed the baking of biscuits for the Aidilfitri, which used to be an annual tradition at Istana Abdulaziz.

It had to be given a miss this year as the royal couple have been busy and are now living at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur, she said.

Salmiah, 63, who has been working at the palace for 31 years, said the baking would usually start on the second week of Ramadan and several of Tunku Azizah's biscuit recipes would be used.

"Her Majesty will usually say that we start off with cornflakes cookies, followed by coconut cookies. The remaining cornflake, coconut or quaker oat ingredients will be kept for the final

cookie recipe which is the *anzac* biscuit.

"Tuanku Azizah is very much against food wastage. That is why she insists that we bake the cookies in that order," said Salmiah, who hails from Sungai Karang.

According to Salmiah, not all staff are allowed to knead the dough but when it comes to shaping or moulding the cookies, staff who are free of duties at that time are welcome to help.

However, Salmiah said that when it came to baking the cookies, Tunku Azizah would only assign the task to her and Norzila to ensure that the cookies are perfectly baked.

Usually, while waiting for others to complete the moulding process, Tunku Azizah would prepare to make her fruit cake mixture.

"Her Majesty's fruit cake is a favourite among her friends and is undeniably delicious as it is generously filled with mixed fruits," said Salmiah.

To maintain the quality of the cakes, only six cakes would be baked each day and it would take four hours to steam each cake.

Salmiah added that Sultan Abdullah and Tunku Azizah have always been deeply concerned over the welfare of the palace staff that it is sad for them when the royal couple has to be away residing at Istana Negara.

"We miss them greatly. I once showed Sultan Abdullah my swollen knees ... coincidentally he had an appointment at the Tengku Ampuan Afzan Hospital. Surprisingly, he asked me to come along to have his specialist attend to my ailment," she said.

The staff of the palace are also given the opportunity to perform the *umrah (minor Haj)*, courtesy of Sultan Abdullah and Tunku Azizah.

Before departing for the trip, the royal couple would offer their blessings and give the staff

some pocket money, said Salmiah.

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