

Boosting cultural understanding

By LEE CHONGHUI
educate@thestar.com.my

SOME say the best things in life are free, while others believe the best things in life are earned.

Coming up with funds on one's own initiative allows the recognition and appreciation of the value of money as well as experiences "bought" with it.

So earning "pocket money" is exactly what Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Centre for the Advancement of Language (CALC) is doing to fund a mobility programme for students to visit Yadanabon University, Mandalay, Myanmar, from Oct 27 to Nov 9.

Dubbed the "Language and Cultural Engagement Programme", the project is aimed at boosting understanding of culture and collaboration between both countries, as well as increasing engagement between UPM students and

native Myanmar speakers.

CALC recently conducted a cooking demo "Flavours of Myanmar: Cooking Show with Chef Wan" to raise funds for the trip, which is estimated to cost RM35,000 for 10 students and their chaperones.

Food icon Datuk Redzuawan Ismail - fondly known as Chef Wan - along with the mobility programme's leader Daw Thi Da Than@Sarah Hashim and UPM senior lecturer Assoc Prof Dr Mohamad Shahrim Karim demonstrated how to cook authentic Myanmar cuisine such as Danbawk (Myanmar briyani), Mohinga (fish-based soup prepared with rice noodles) and Gin Thoke (ginger salad) at De.Wan 1958 by Chef Wan - a new restaurant the Malaysian celebrity chef launched in Kuala Lumpur early this year.

Sarah, who has taught at CALC for 23 years, said RM8,000 was



Chef Wan (in brown batik shirt), Sarah (on Chef Wan's right), and Dr Mohamad Shahrim (beside Sarah) taking a group photo with UPM students and volunteers after the cooking demonstration.

raised from the event sponsored by Chef Wan. He offered UPM his restaurant and provided a sumptuous buffet spread consisting of some of his most popular dishes.

"We still need to raise another RM24,000 for the trip to happen. We have raised RM8,000 from this event and another RM3,000 from selling danbawk during Ramadan.

"I would cook the food while my students are in charge of selling and delivering it within UPM. We are still selling danbawk to raise more money," said Sarah, adding that more fundraisers would be conducted. She hopes that the mobility programme will become a reality so that students can have a deeper understanding

of the Myanmar culture.

"The programme allows students to understand and witness unity, and living in harmony amid diversity.

"This is so they learn to embrace different cultures," she said.

Noting that an exchange programme allows learners to challenge themselves, CALC director Assoc Prof Dr Arshad Abd Samad said it also helps students to gain valuable experiences and exposure at an international level.

"CALC encourages teachers and students to conduct activities beyond the classroom to increase engagement in the language, thus elevating motivation to learn more about the language and understand the culture it repre-

sents," he said.

A firm believer that food is the bridge that connects people, Chef Wan said language is crucial too.

"Through food we find love, friendship, peace, and respect. And, language has always been an important communication tool among people of the world.

"I believe in one humanity, one world. That is why we need to embrace people across all cultures," he said.

Myanmar Ambassador to Malaysia Daw Sein New Aye, Economic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali's wife Datin Sri Shamsidar Taharim and Selangor Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari's wife Masdiana Muhamad also graced the event.