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A Lankan dish for Obama

Top chef Radith Munasinghe cooks up a winner of a supper for Senator Barack Obama at Seychelles holiday resort

By Mettananda Sirisena

US Senator Barack Obama and his wife Michelle were on holiday a few months back in the romantic Seychelles resort of Fregate Island, and during his stay the US Presidential-hopeful was so pleased with a culinary creation by the Sri Lankan head chef that he made special mention of it in the hotel visitors' book, calling it "a Sri Lankan supper". The local chef who impressed was Radith Munasinghe. The culinary treat was a rice-and-curry meal done Radith-style – "Radith Rice with Lime Pickle (Lunu Dehi)".



US Senator Barack Obama and his wife Michelle

more about the country. The Sri Lankan dinner that night was served in clay pots and on yam leaves. The Senator had no problem with the spicy dishes, according to Radith. Mrs. Obama also enjoyed the food, and the couple praised Radith for his efforts.

On the day of his departure, the Senator dropped by at the hotel kitchen to thank the staff. He told Radith he would not forget the meal he had served the couple. He then recorded his appreciation in the visitors' book.

Mundigala Arachchilage Radith Kumar Munasinghe hails from Imbulpitiya, in Eheliyagoda. He studied at S. Thomas' College, Bandarawela, and in 1996 enrolled in the Hotel School. During his three-year diploma course, he received training at some of Colombo's leading hotels and also worked at the Unawatuna Beach Hotel, the Habarana Village, the Culture Club and the Eden Hotel.

Radith is grateful to all those who helped to groom him as a chef, and makes special mention of veteran chef Publis Silva.

The much-travelled Radith has worked in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bahrain, the Maldives, the Seychelles and South Africa. In June 2007, he joined the Fregate Island Private Ltd Hotel, in the Seychelles chain, a choice tourist attraction. Currently on holiday, Radith is enjoying a break back home with his family, his wife and eight-year-old son.

The VIP guests spent a week at the Fregate Hotel. According to Radith, the charismatic politician told the hotel management that he and his wife were looking forward to sampling various cuisines. As head chef, Radith decided to prepare something special. He arranged for a Sri Lanka night, featuring his original basmathi-rice-lunu-dehi creation as the centre-piece. Other items on the menu were "keselmuwa maluwa", fresh fish, a sweet potato curry and "pol sambol".

Senator Obama, who loves fishing, invited Radith to go fishing with him that morning in the hope of netting a good catch for Radith's fish dish that night. Radith drove the couple from their villa to the beach and back in a buggy used to show tourists around.

On learning that Radith hailed from Sri Lanka, the Senator showed a keen interest in learning

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Recipe for “Radith Rice with Lunu Dehi”



(for six persons)

*One bottle lime pickle,
One kilo Basmathi rice,
2 big onions
3 cloves of garlic
3 green chillies
1 tbsp mustard
Vegetable oil and butter
Karapincha (curry leaves)
A pinch of saffron
A dash of soya sauce*



Chef Radith Munasinghe

Method: Chop the lunu dehi into very small pieces. Thinly slice the onions and garlic. Split the green chillies, wash the rice, add salt and saffron and cook the rice. In another pan, heat the butter and oil, and when hot add the mustard, onion, karapincha and garlic. Fry until golden brown. Add soya sauce and lunu dehi and simmer for a while. Finally, add the cooked rice to the lunu dehi mixture. Lower flame and mix well. Add salt to taste and serve.

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