

Mmaids celebrate birthdays at Singapore bicentennial party



Indonesian Siti Mur Wati Bawel (third from left), who turns 41 today, joined other maids with August birthdays as well to blow out candles and cut a rainbow sponge cake yesterday. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

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300 maids attend event held by foreign domestic worker group



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Indonesian domestic worker Siti Mur Wati Bawel celebrated her birthday together with Singapore's bicentennial year yesterday.

The event was organised by Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training (Fast), a charity supported by the Ministry of Manpower.

About 300 domestic workers turned up at the Fast clubhouse in Jalan Bukit Merah for the celebrations. Representatives from the embassies of the workers' source countries, including Cambodia, the Philippines and Myanmar, also joined in.

Ms Bawel, who turns 41 today, was nursing a fever but was still determined to attend the event.

She joined seven other domestic workers, who were also born in August, to blow out candles and cut a rainbow sponge cake. "I am happy because it is nice to celebrate my birthday with my friends here," said Ms Bawel, who has been working here for two decades.

Fast's assistant treasurer Leslie Yong said in a speech at the event: "Besides celebrating Singapore's independence, the occasion offers our domestic helpers and friends another opportunity to better understand the culture, customs and values that we embrace."

Activities such as a trivia quiz about Singapore's history, music and food were held, while booths were set up so that domestic helpers could play traditional games from the past, such as five stones, hopscotch and chapteh.

A band comprising foreign domestic workers performed familiar National Day tunes, including songs like Stand Up For Singapore.

And this being Singapore, there was a good spread of local food, from roti prata to chicken rice to durians.

Ms Bawel, who is usually treated to a birthday buffet meal by her employer's family, had a temporary tattoo of a Singapore flag pasted on her left hand.

The Fast clubhouse has become one of her favourite spots and she visits it on Sundays, her day off.

"Singapore is my second home. I come to the clubhouse to teach others to crochet things like blankets, bags or scarves. Sometimes, I join in the Zumba classes," she said.

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