

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

***For immediate release***

### **PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON HERITAGE BUSINESSES IN KAMPONG GELAM THAT STRADDLE GENERATIONS**

**Singapore, 22 April 2021** – What do businesses in Kampong Gelam like Bhai Sarbat Singapore, Sin Hin Chuan Kee and V.S.S. Varusai Mohamed & Sons have in common? Each has at least 30 years of history operating in a precinct that is steeped in history and heritage! These heritage businesses that call the area home have withstood many changes over the years, and have collected a treasure trove of stories along the way that are waiting to be told.

2 The rich experiences of these businesses are being celebrated and documented through the National Heritage Board's (NHB) ***Street Corner Heritage Galleries*** scheme, which will be launched in the Kampong Gelam precinct on 22 April 2021, with seven participating shops and businesses.

3 Under this scheme, NHB works closely with owners of local shops with at least three decades of history to co-create “mini museums” at their premises that showcase the history and heritage of their businesses and trades. These galleries feature historical documents, photographs and artefacts that tell their lesser-known stories.

4 Besides the three mentioned businesses mentioned earlier, the other businesses that are involved in *Street Corner Heritage Galleries: Kampong Gelam* are Jamal Kazura Aromatics, Rumah Makan Minang, Sabar Menanti Nasi Padang and Warong Nasi Pariaman (please refer to **Annex A**).

5 The ***Street Corner Heritage Galleries*** initiative is part of NHB's ongoing efforts under *Our SG Heritage Plan* to strengthen partnerships with communities, and raise awareness of and foster a deeper appreciation for heritage in everyday spaces. It is a 3-year pilot which was first launched with five shops in the Balestier precinct in March 2020, and will subsequently be extended to three other historic precincts – Little India, Kreta Ayer/Chinatown and Geylang Serai – by 2022.

6 On top of providing funding, curatorial support and assistance in fabricating the showcases, NHB will also work with the shop owners to develop programmes such as talks, tours and workshops, and give them the opportunity to participate in key NHB events such as the *Singapore Heritage Festival* and the respective *CultureFests* of the heritage institutions in their precincts.

7 Mr Alvin Tan, Deputy Chief Executive (Policy & Community), NHB said: “Through the scheme, we hope to involve traditional business owners in documenting and showcasing their heritage, develop an accessible network of mini-museums in the precinct, and create unexpected heritage encounters for the public as part of our ongoing place-making efforts for a more vibrant Kampong Gelam.”

8 Please refer to **Annex A** for an introduction to the seven *Street Corner Heritage Galleries* in Kampong Gelam, and **Annex B** for the list of artefacts.

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**About the National Heritage Board**

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit [www.nhb.gov.sg](http://www.nhb.gov.sg) for more information.

### Street Corner Heritage Galleries - Kampong Gelam

#### 1. Deep roots of a sweet street favourite



#### **Bhai Sarbat Singapore 21 Bussorah St, Singapore 199439**

Sweet and spiced with ginger, *teh sarabat* (also known as *teh halia*) has long been a familiar, simple pleasure to quench one's thirst at any time of the day.

Bhai Sarbat has been offering *teh sarabat* and other local favourites to patrons since the 1950s when the beverage business was started by a migrant from India known colloquially as Firuz.

First operating as a *becak* ("cycle rickshaw" in Malay) stall, Bhai Sarbat settled into a shophouse in the 1970s. When current owner Mohammad Asgar bought over the business in 2018, he named the shop Bhai Sarbat ("Brother Sarbat" in Hindi and Urdu) after overhearing a customer referring to its colloquial name.

The shop's success is built on the popularity of *teh tarik* and *teh sarabat*, both pulled tea drinks with the latter usually including a ginger extract. In Arabic, Persian and Indian cultures, *sharbat*, from which *sarabat* is derived, is generally understood to be a sweet, usually syrup-based drink. However, the term was also adopted for pulled ginger tea in Singapore and Malaysia.

*Teh sarabat* and *teh tarik* are made with black tea and condensed milk, and Bhai Sarbat's tea masters demonstrate their individual flair using different pulling techniques. Pulled between two mugs, the varying techniques and lengths of the pull subtly change the temperature and taste of the tea while producing a frothy top layer.

To cater to evolving tastes, Asgar has expanded the drinks menu from 12 to more than 120 drinks, and roped in his son Zaki as a next-generation tea master. Today, a steady flow of new, as well as regular customers continues to patronise the shop.

## 2. Attar through the generations



### **Jamal Kazura Aromatics** **21 Bussorah St, Singapore 199439**

Since 1933, Jamal Kazura Aromatics has concocted an extensive assortment of perfumes encompassing a diverse variety of scents. The business was founded as Kazura Company by Mohamed Hanifa bin Mohamed Shariff, who had migrated to Singapore from South India via the Riau Islands.

Hanifa's first shop was located at 728 North Bridge Road, and in the early years, he sold a variety of items, including books, gemstones, apparel and perfumes. Many of his customers were pilgrims on the Haj and congregants at the nearby Masjid Sultan.

After taking over the business in the mid-1970s, the founder's son Mohamed Jamal bin Mohamed Hanifa renamed the business Jamal Kazura Aromatics and focused on selling perfumes, essential oils and incense. The business also began specialising in non-alcoholic perfumes known as *attar* in Arabic. For centuries, *attar* has been a high-prestige

item in Islamic communities worldwide, with some Muslims applying scents on themselves before prayers.

Using essential oils such as saffron, sandalwood and frankincense, Jamal blends and creates numerous distinctive perfumes, including bestsellers “Symphony” and “Sultan”. Jamal’s children, now third-generation managers of the business, recall going to school wearing multifarious scents as their father would test his perfumes on them.

From the 1990s, the business broadened its perfume range to cater to evolving tastes and a multi-ethnic, multi-religious clientele, which includes Buddhists purchasing sandalwood incense and Christians buying frankincense. In 2009, the founder’s grandson Johari Kazura opened Sifr Aromatics at 42 Arab Street, offering more bespoke perfumes and sustaining his family’s heritage of craft and innovation.

### 3. Heritage food, community and custom



**Rumah Makan Minang**  
**18 & 18A Kandahar Street, Singapore 198884**

Established in the early 1980s, Rumah Makan Minang is one of the successors of the original Sabar Menanti restaurant. Growing up and working in the family-run Sabar Menanti stall, owner Zulbaidah binte Marlian had firsthand experience of how her mother

Hajjah Rosemah binte Mailu exemplified the independent, strong female figures esteemed in Minangkabau culture. Following in her footsteps, Zulbaidah founded her own nasi padang establishment, Rumah Makan Minang, with her husband Mohamed Zin bin Harun.

One of the centrepieces of *nasi padang* cuisine is beef *rendang*, a slow-cooked dish of beef, spices and coconut which originated from the Minangkabau people but has also been adapted in other regional cuisines. Rumah Makan Minang's *rendang* is faithful to the drier, caramelised style served in Sungai Limau, West Sumatra, where Rosemah was born.

The restaurant's other popular dishes are *ayam belado hijau* (fried chicken with signature green *sambal belado*) and *paru belado merah* (fried cow lung with red *sambal belado*), whose main ingredients are cooked with *sambal belado*, a coarse chilli paste that is widely used in Minangkabau cuisine. Another characteristic of Minangkabau cuisine is the use of *santan* (coconut milk) and fresh grated coconut instead of *kerisik* (fried coconut paste).

The above-mentioned cooking techniques and recipes at Rumah Makan Minang bear the imprint of three generations, from Hajjah Rosemah and Haji Marlian to Zulbaidah and Zin, and their children, Hazmi, Syahidah, Ariff and Nazri. Under their charge, the business opened a central kitchen to ensure the consistency and quality of their food, and added a new branch in Tampines in 2017. Their *rendang* has also been showcased on Shangri-La Hotel's heritage menu, even as its recipe remains a family secret.

#### 4. A nasi padang legacy



**Sabar Menanti Nasi Padang**  
737 North Bridge Rd, Singapore 198715

Continuing the legacy of one of the most well-known *nasi padang* restaurants in Singapore, this restaurant was founded as Sabar Menanti II in 1997 by Maryulis Bagindor binte Marlian, the eldest daughter of the original restaurant's founders Haji Marlian bin Athar and Hajjah Rosemah binte Mailu.

Sabar Menanti, the original establishment, started as an unnamed street stall in the 1920s. It was once colloquially known as *nasi padang batu nisan* ("tombstone nasi padang" in Malay) as it was located next to a prominent tombstone maker. The name Sabar Menanti, which means "wait patiently" in Malay, only came about in the 1960s when Haji Marlian's friend gifted him a signboard from a previous restaurant.

In her younger days, Maryulis and her siblings would gather firewood for the stoves and collect water from a public standpipe near Sultan Gate while their parents cooked. By the 1990s, the business had expanded into six restaurants in Kampong Gelam, each helmed by second generation members of the Marlian family.

Priding itself on preserving traditional flavours, Sabar Menanti's cuisine expresses its Minangkabau heritage through techniques such as charcoal grilling and the use of traditional spices and ingredients. These methods are apparent in their *rendang* and other favourites including *ikan bakar* (grilled fish) and *ayam gulai* (Padang-style chicken curry).

Today, Sabar Menanti remains true to its heritage, even as the restaurant seeks to appeal to a new generation of customers. When Maryulis' son Mohamad Iszahar Tambunan took over, he renamed the restaurant to reflect that it is the sole Sabar Menanti in operation, and has updated the restaurant's decor and added food delivery options. The other members of the family, meanwhile, continue to use traditional cooking techniques and recipes for the restaurant's array of *nasi padang* dishes.

## 5. The house of small things



**Sin Hin Chuan Kee**  
**796/798 North Bridge Road, Singapore 198766**

Sin Hin Chuan Kee's proprietors often describe the business as having grown together with generations of its customers. Founded in 1965 by Ng Koon Teng, an immigrant from Quanzhou, China, this family-run haberdashery and trading business boomed in part due to the import and export opportunities that Singapore enjoyed as a trading hub.

After working in a trading firm, Ng established Sin Hin Chuan Kee Trading Co in a shop at 47 Clyde Street, with his family roots reflected in the name "Chuan Kee", which translates to "remembering Quan(zhou)" in Hokkien. Capitalising on Singapore's position as an entrepot and trading hub, Ng sold thread, lace, buttons and assorted accessories to factories, tailors and traders. When Clyde Street underwent redevelopment in the 1970s, the shop relocated to Kampong Gelam.

Displaying an entrepreneurial zeal, Ng and his family sought out suppliers throughout Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, and sourced for products such as Flying Wheel sewing thread from China and later YKK zippers from Japan, both of which became cornerstones of their distribution business. Ng's successors, including sons Ng Cheow Poh, Ng Cheow Kok and their siblings expanded the business by finding new customers in India, Thailand, Malaysia and other countries.

During the economic boom in the 1970s and 1980s, traders from various countries could be seen queuing up outside the shop and paying cash for large orders of YKK zippers and other accessories. The shop's staff would then transport the goods to Boat Quay to be shipped across the world, or delivered to the buyers at various locations.

From the 2000s, the third generation of the Ng family, including the founder's grandsons Adrian Ng and Kenny Ng, grew the retail arm of their business and established an online storefront. These adaptations, among others, have helped sustain Sin Hin Chuan Kee and keep the business relevant to a new generation of customers.

## 6. From Kampong Gelam to the Haj



### **V. S. S. Varusai Mohamed & Sons** **719 North Bridge Rd, Singapore 198687**

Since 1935, V. S. S. Varusai Mohamed & Sons has provided hundreds of thousands of Muslims with accessories that are useful for the Haj pilgrimage. The business was founded by Valanadu Sinnagani Syeda Mohamed Varusai Mohamed, a Tiruchirappalli, India-born migrant who arrived in Singapore from Rangoon, Myanmar.

Varusai Mohamed started his entrepreneurial career selling socks in Kampong Gelam, before setting up a factory at the nearby Crawford Court area to manufacture and sell steel baggage trunks and umbrellas. The product that the business is best known for, however, is a sturdy, practical belt used by Haj travellers, known colloquially in Malay as *tali pinggang haji* or simply as a green belt.

While on the Haj, pilgrims wear unstitched and seamless robes known as *ihram*, which are meant to signify the equality of all Muslims before God. During his own Haj journey, Varusai Mohamed noticed that many pilgrims were tying their money pouches and other possessions to their *ihram* using makeshift methods, and he was inspired to design a belt to carry money and necessities.

In 1935, Varusai Mohamed patented the Makkah Zam Zam Belt in the United Kingdom and proceeded to manufacture the belt in Singapore using quality components. At its peak, some 60,000 belts were exported to the Middle East each year. Varusai Mohamed's customers for the belts and other Haj accessories included pilgrims from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, who made a stop at the Kampong Gelam area on their way to and from the Haj.

The second and third generations of this family-run business maintained its longstanding presence in Kampong Gelam, and have expanded the range of goods available to include *ihram* clothing, incense and perfumes among others. The latter two products in particular have helped Varusai Mohamed attract a multicultural customer base.

## 7. A tradition of charcoal and spices



**Warong Nasi Pariaman**  
**738 North Bridge Rd, Singapore 198706**

The Minangkabau tradition of *merantau*, or customary migration, has been linked to the widespread popularity of beef *rendang* throughout Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. A flavourful, slow-cooked dish that serves as a reminder of home for the Minangkabau migrants, *rendang* and other *nasi padang* favourites have been mainstays here at Warong Nasi Pariaman for decades.

Established by Isrin bin Ibrahim and his wife Rosna binte Zainal Abidin, Warong Nasi Pariaman has been serving *nasi padang* (also known as Minang cuisine) from this North Bridge Road shop since 1948. Having migrated to Singapore in the 1940s, Isrin and his family operated from a street stall before renting a shophouse and naming their business after their hometown of Pariaman, a city in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

The patriarch Isrin's insistence on quality ingredients, cooking methods and presentation continues to guide Warong Nasi Pariaman's cuisine in the 21st century. Under the charge of the founder's children Sudirman, Jumrin, Munaf and Nasrin, the restaurant specialises


in *nasi padang* dishes including beef *rendang* (beef stew), *ayam bakar* (grilled chicken) and *gulai nangka* (jackfruit curry).


The *rendang* and *ayam bakar* here reflect the traditional cooking techniques of Minangkabau culture, with the former slow-cooked over a charcoal fire, in a stew that includes *rempah* (spice paste), coconut milk, onions, lemongrass and kaffir lime leaves. The latter dish, *ayam bakar*, is cooked in a coconut gravy before being charcoal grilled, and both dishes possess a subtle smoky flavour that many customers love.

In the 21st century, Isrin's granddaughter Yanty Sulastry Emrin represents the third generation of the family working in the business. Together with other longstanding *nasi padang* establishments in Kampong Gelam, Warong Nasi Pariaman continues to keep Minangkabau culinary traditions alive in the area.




**List of Artefacts**





**1. Bhai Sarbat Singapore**

No.	Image	Caption
1		This sock is used to filter tea or coffee powder for drinks at Bhai Sarbat, including the famous <i>teh halia</i> and <i>teh tarik</i> .
2		This ginger extract is used to flavour <i>teh halia</i> , a drink with a long tradition in India and the Middle East as well as in Southeast Asia.
3		These ground black tea leaves, which often contain robust flavours and an astringent aftertaste, are used for drinks such as <i>teh tarik</i> .
4		These metal jugs are used by Bhai Sarbat's tea masters to <i>tarik</i> ("pull" in Malay) tea, which cools the drink and subtly changes their flavour.







5		<p>This glass cup features a design that is a familiar sight in coffeeshops across Singapore, and this picture contains <i>teh tarik</i> with a full head of froth.</p>
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## 2. Jamal Kazura Aromatics





No.	Image	Caption
1		<p>A photograph of Kazura Company's founder Mohamed Hanifa bin Mohamed Shariff (middle) with two business partners from Switzerland.</p>
2		<p>These stamps were used as the company's "seal" on documents, or to provide additional information about the products. The stamp on the right features the company seal, and the stamp on the left provides directions for use for the Kazura brand insect spray.</p>
3		<p>A page from a book used by Mohamed Jamal containing notes on the formulations for six perfumes. The list of components includes extracts of <i>parijatham</i> (night-flowering jasmine), <i>thalamboo</i> (pandan) and chypre fragrances (a family of citrus and woody base fragrances).</p>



4		<p>These tools are used by the master perfumers of Jamal Kazura to measure and mix various extracts and scents.</p> <p>From left to right: A test tube used for measuring extracts, oils and solvents; a beaker used for mixing compounds; a pipette used for decanting; and a syringe for transferring liquid.</p>
5		<p>This ornamental perfume bottle holder is among those sold by Jamal Kazura. In some households, perfume bottles and holders are displayed for decorative purposes.</p> <p>This perfume mixing tool (below) is used to blend a wide variety of fragrances, solvents and fixatives.</p>
6		<p>This elaborate burner is used to contain incense, which gives off its fragrance when heated with lit charcoal.</p>
7		<p>This is a piece of agarwood, which produces a resin that is valued for its fragrance when heated. Agarwood is found in parts of South Asia and Southeast Asia and has been traded as incense and essential oils for millennia.</p>

### 3. Rumah Makan Minang

No.	Image	Caption
1		This photograph shows the previous location of Rumah Makan Minang, which occupied three shophouse units on Bussorah Street in October 1993.
2		This photograph shows Zulbaidah binte Marlian and Mohamad Zin working in the kitchen of their first restaurant in the early 1990s.
3		This set of implements comprising a rice basket and <i>senduk nasi tempurung</i> (scooper with a coconut shell head) is used to serve rice to customers.
4		This ladle is used to scoop food onto plates for customers. During busy periods, customers at <i>nasi padang</i> shops typically queue up and select their dishes from a display counter, which are then served on a plate of rice or on individual plates for sharing.
5		This ladle is used to scoop coconut milk after its separation process from grated coconuts. Coconut milk is an ingredient which has long been used in Minangkabau and other cuisines of Southeast Asia.
6		This photograph from the 1990s shows, from left to right, Mohamad Zin bin Harun, the co-founder of the business, with his sons Mohamad Ariff bin Mohamad Zin and Muhamad Nazri bin Mohamad Zin.






#### 4. Sabar Menanti Nasi Padang

No.	Image	Caption
1		This photograph from 1966 shows the family behind the original Sabar Menanti. The business' co-founder, Rosemah Mailu, is seated third from left.
2		This charcoal clay stove is used to cook <i>rendang</i> and other dishes. Many Minangkabau dishes are known for the smoky flavours imparted through charcoal cooking and grilling.
3		This clip griller is used to barbecue fish, typically <i>ikan selar</i> , which is served whole with sweet black sauce, cut chilli and onions among other ingredients.
4		<p>These are some of the spices used in <i>nasi padang</i> dishes.</p> <p>The condiments in this container include (from left) <i>rendang</i> powder, chilli powder and a mixture of cumin and fennel powder.</p> <p>The condiments in this container includes (from top left) nutmeg and cinnamon, and (from bottom left) a combination of star anise and cardamom, and clove.</p>

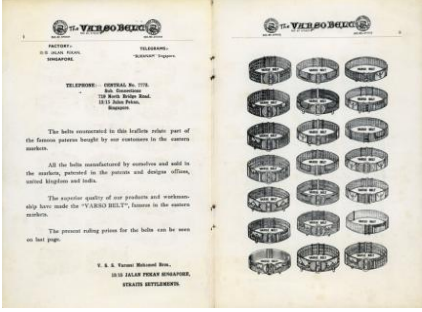
5		This banana leaf and waxed paper package is used for takeaways and is referred to as <i>nasi bungkus</i> ("takeaway rice" in Malay).
6		A selection of <i>nasi padang</i> dishes: (top row from left) beef <i>rendang</i> , <i>begedil</i> , <i>achar</i> , (bottom row from left) <i>ikan bakar</i> and <i>ayam bakar</i> .

## 5. Sin Hin Chuan Kee




No.	Image	Caption
1		A photograph of Ng Koon Teng (left), the business' founder, in Sin Hin Chuan Kee's first shop at 47 Clyde Street.
2		This abacus was used by Ng Koon Teng and other members of his family to tally earnings.
3		A photograph of the founder's son Ng Cheow Poh (left) standing in front of Sin Hin Chuan Kee at Clyde Street.


4		This paper bag features images of accessories sold at Sin Hin Chuan Kee, as well as the address of its first shop at 47 Clyde Street.
5		This Flying Wheel brand of sewing thread was among the early products that Sin Hin Chuan Kee imported from China. These threads are known for their quality and have consistently been one of the best-selling products in the shop.
6		These bundles of fabric trimmings with various motifs were among Sin Hin Chuan Kee's best-selling products in the 1980s.
7		This book of samples containing YKK brand zippers allowed customers to peruse zippers on sale at the shop. Sin Hin Chuan Kee first carried YKK products in the 1960s and later became a distributor for the Japanese brand.
8		These scissors were made for everyday use (left) and for cutting textiles (right).

## 6. V. S. S. Varsai Mohamed & Sons

No.	Image	Caption
1		<p>This is a photograph of Valanadu Sinnagani Syeda Mohamed Varusai Mohamed, the founder of the business. Hailing from Tiruchirappalli in India, he arrived in Singapore in 1924.</p>
2	 	<p>This Haj belt, shown with its packaging, has been a mainstay of Varusai's business for decades. In the early years, the belt was only available in green, and became colloquially known either as a "green belt" or <i>tali pinggang haji</i> ("Haj belt" in Malay).</p>
3		<p>This catalogue from the pre-World War II era shows the wide variety of Haj belt designs available under the Varso belt brand name. The address of Varusai's first factory at Jalan Pekan (now the Crawford Court area) is also printed on the left page.</p>
4		<p>This syringe, dropper and glass bottle are used in various stages of perfume production. Besides its mainstay Haj accessories, Varusai also expanded into perfumes and incense.</p>

## 7. Warong Nasi Pariaman

No.	Image	Caption
1		This photograph shows a pushcart used in the 1980s when <i>rendang</i> and other <i>nasi padang</i> dishes were cooked at the family home at the nearby Bussorah Street, before being transported to the shop.
2		This photograph shows Mak Enon, a long-time staff of Pariaman, preparing ingredients for <i>nasi padang</i> .
3		This photograph shows the interior of Warong Nasi Pariaman before the restaurant's renovation in the 1980s.

4		<p>This simple set up resembles the charcoal cooking system used by the chefs at Pariaman. Many <i>nasi padang</i> dishes are cooked over a charcoal fire, and the chefs here use a Milo tin for storing charcoal, and tongs and a handheld fan to tend to the fire.</p>
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