



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to Editor

23 May 2016

Ban Ramadhan Advertisements

“Ramadan Buffet...The Buka Puasa feast in this hotel is recognized to be among the most exciting spreads...has drawn an increasing number of patrons for corporate entertainment and family dining... The menu comprises more than 100 dishes daily...as you break your fast to the tantalizing treats available, live Ghazal Asli music fills the air...a Surau is made available for our Muslim patrons’ convenience...RM95 nett per adult and RM48 nett per child...”

This is an advertisement that appeared in a local daily on the last day of Rejab this year, one month before Ramadhan. More such advertisements will appear as we get nearer to Ramadhan promoting clothes, shoes, carpets, curtains, and other goods and services.

Iftar, breaking fast, traditionally in the home with the family members or in the mosque in a spiritual environment, has been turned into a “feast with a 100-dish spread” and for “corporate entertainment”. Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. broke his fast with only three dates.

Ramadhan is the holiest month in the Muslim calendar when the holy Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet. Allah says in the Holy Quran that fasting has been prescribed so that we may attain Taqwa (God consciousness) and it has been reported of the Prophet (saw)saying: “Allah said, every action of the son of Adam is for him except fasting, for that is solely for Me, I give reward for it. The fast is a shield”.

Ramdan is supposed to be a month of intense devotion for Muslims as it is a month when the shaytan is chained, a God given opportunity when Muslims can collectively dedicate themselves to deepen and strengthen their Taqwa.

It is such a sacred month and it is being trivialised by the calls to buka puasa feasts and promoting mindless spending. This commercialization of Ramadan is as offensive as uncouth Muslims eating in public during the fast.

Fasting is not only abstaining from food but keeping all our senses under control so that we do not commit sinful activities – gluttony, lying, back-biting, wasting time, and oppressing others. Muslims are required to spend their time in prayer, remembrance of Allah, helping the poor and needy, and practising charity. Our fast has no value unless we strive to become more spiritual. Otherwise, as the Prophet s.a.w. said: “Many receive nothing from the fast except hunger and thirst.”

Islam enjoins its followers to avoid gluttony, waste and extravagance. The Prophet s.a.w. said: “The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach; for the son of Adam a few mouthfuls are sufficient to keep his back straight. If you must fill it then one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for air.” Contrary to this teaching, some people eat and drink so much that they become lazy and neglect to perform their *terawih* prayers and even the mandatory ones. Gluttony also has serious adverse health effects – diabetes, coronary diseases, and hypertension - on those indulging in it.

Excessive varieties and quantities of food prepared for *iftar* and *sahur* leads to waste. A lot of food is thrown away by hotels and families into the waste dumps. Last year the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp) reported that every Ramadhan 200,000 tonnes of food go straight into the rubbish bins. This quantity of food could feed 180 million people. An average of 9000 tonnes of food was discarded daily during Ramadan. [*The Star Online*, 19 June 2015].

Throwing away food is a sin as it deprives food for the needy ones and the future generation. It also depletes resources

and contributes to environmental degradation through pollution of seas and rivers and discharge of carbon dioxide, responsible for global warming. One of the objects of fasting is to feel the pain of hunger experienced by the poor and marginalized so that we will have empathy for them. Millions of people in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, Myanmar, India, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan are facing starvation and yet we are throwing away huge quantities of food in the holy month.

The Qur'an condemns those who waste and squander as the brothers of Shaitan. [Surah Al-Isra Verses 26, 27] Further, the Qur'an says: "...and eat and drink without going to excesses. For Allah does not like those who go to excess." [Surah Al-Araf Verse 31].

The TV stations also produce soap operas, comedies and entertainment targeting those who fast. Families spend more time before TV sets than in the mosques trying to come closer to Allah through prayer and other spiritual activities. In some Arab countries, Ramadhan tents provide lavish dinners and late night entertainment until *sahur*. An online portal reported in 2014:

"Much of the region [West Asa] turns nocturnal during the Holy Month, so it's the best opportunity to hook fast-weary viewers with the newest series and TV dramas. How it pans out is that families will sit in front of the TV together after *iftar*... and that's pretty much it. They'll be watching episode after episode of different soaps and programmes, then may be even the re-runs until *suhur*."

The commercialisation of Ramadhan has stripped it of its spiritual significance to become an opportunity for the promotion of consumerism and its purveyors like sports stars, models and actresses in skimpy clothes, and pop icons. It is the desacralisation of religion and the practice is akin to the commercialization of Christmas which has become a season of shopping. The health of the United States economy is dependent on the level of Christmas shopping.

It is not confined to Malaysia only but has become a global phenomenon with the invasion of capitalism and its hedonistic consumer culture. From New York to Jakarta, Ramadhan advertisements are coaxing consumers to indulge in gluttony and extravagance which are prohibited in Islam.

Commercialization of *Ramadhan*, *Aidil Fitri* and *Aidil Adha* is a subtle process of secularization of our ideas, tastes and culture. It is like the termites silently eating away at our pillar of *iman* without us being conscious of the damage. It promotes materialism and wasteful excessive consumption, burdening us with debts. We become so obsessed with making money and getting rich to purchase unnecessary goods, services and entertainment that we neglect our duty to and relationship with Allah. We forget that we are travelers on a journey to the hereafter.

What must we do to arrest this creeping secularization? Advertising products and services using *Ramadhan*, *Aidil Fitri* and *Aidil Adha* must be banned. The Islamic scholars, must strongly condemn this abhorrence and must issue fatwas prohibiting the exploitation of Ramadan and safeguard Muslims. Muslim civil society organisations must also launch a campaign against desacralisation of *Ramadhan*, *Aidil Fitri* and *Aidil Adha*.

InshaAllah Ramadhan this year will be free from these sinful practices and adhere to Allah's call to attain Taqwa.

SM Mohamed Idris
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Consumers Association of Penang