

No worry over food for varsity students this Ramadan

With the fasting month starting next week, universities are making changes to food delivery schedules so that tens of thousands of students will still get their meals during the holy month. > See report by ALLISON LAI on page 5

No food worry for Ramadan

Universities working to ensure students still get their meals

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PETALING JAYA: Universities are working with food caterers and vendors to ensure that about 80,000 students staying put in campus hostels under the movement control order (MCO) continue to get their meals when Ramadan comes.

The student affairs departments of several universities agreed that some changes would be made to the delivery schedule of meals for Muslim students, but this would not affect food supplies at all.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs and alumni) Prof Dr Mohd Roslan Sulaiman said the university management had met with caterers over the distribution of food to students at different times.

"The routine will change slightly as we will provide food for the non-Muslim and Muslim students, but it is not a problem to cater to that.

"All four of our food caterers have agreed to provide food to all students according to the stipulated time, with some changes in the number of food packs," he said in an interview.

Mohd Roslan said breakfast, lunch and dinner would be provided as usual to non-Muslim students when Ramadan begins.

"The buka puasa meal should be no problem for all as Muslim students will be breaking their fast and



others will have dinner.

"Sahur meals will be given out to students as early as after midnight so that they can consume it anytime they want before dawn," he added.

There are 1,370 and 899 students staying on campus hostels at UPM's Serdang and Bintulu, Sarawak, branches respectively, he said, adding that students in Bintulu get their food from the canteen.

On March 18, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said in a special address that students living in accommodations at higher learning institutions will not be allowed to travel home during the MCO.

This comes as parents urged the government to allow their children who are staying in campuses to leave for home.

On April 11, Senior Minister and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob rejected any review as it would involve the movement of almost 80,000 students living on campus in private and public universities nationwide.

He said the estimated figure did not include those who were renting rooms outside the campus.

Universiti Malaya student affairs and alumni deputy vice-chancellor Prof Dr Abdul Aziz Abdul Raman said 70% of the 1,686 students living on its main campus hostels in Kuala Lumpur and 77 others at its Nilam Puri campus in Kelantan would get their sahur meal earlier in lieu of breakfast plus the buka puasa meal, while non-Muslims would still get their three meals a day.

"The students are housed in 12 hostels, each having between 50 and 100 people on average, except for a few that have over 200 students.

"A food vendor has been appointed to provide food for a hostel at any time," he said, adding that such arrangements made it simpler to manage to ensure that students were well fed.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs) Prof Dr Othman A. Karim said the university would adjust the delivery times of meals for over 1,400 students living at its main campus in Bangi.

"The usual breakfast, lunch and dinner will become sahur, iftar (breaking of fast) and supper for those fasting.

"Arrangements are being made with the cafeteria operators of the student hostels," he said, adding that the supper would mostly be bread or other dry food.

Prof Othman said the university's Islamic centre usually prepared iftar meals at the mosque.

"Since there will be no iftar at the mosque during the MCO, the centre is looking at how to reach out to students on and off-campus when Ramadan comes.

"Since we also receive contributions of iftar meals from nearby surau and other non-governmental organisations, some arrangement on the distribution is needed to avoid wastage," he added.

UPM student representative council member Khairul Amirin Khairudin said the council had set up teams to work with university management 24/7 to ensure that all students were accounted for.

He said many students had wanted to go home when the MCO was implemented and parents also wanted their children to come home.

"However, they are now more understanding and accepting to do what's better for the nation," he said, adding that a video chat session would be held with the parents of five randomly selected students, the university and the council for feedback.

Khairul Amirin, 22, who has not been back to his hometown in Parit Buntar, Perak, for months, said his parents understood that it was better for him not to return home so soon due to the pandemic.

The third-year Agricultural Science student said he would contact his father Khairudin Ibrahim and mother Rosnah Gani, both 50, through video calls daily whenever they were off from work.