

NO REVIEW IN 7 YEARS

ALL RILED UP OVER

PALTRY CANTEEN FARE

RM2.50 per meal for peninsula and RM3 for Sabah, Sarawak no longer enough, say operators

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PARENTS, teachers and canteen operators have taken the Education Ministry to task after another picture of paltry meals served under the Food Supplementary Programme (FSP) was circulated on social media.

There were also photos of food containers with plain noodles and the occasional shred of carrot in some servings.

The public have called on the ministry to explain these poor meals and raised questions if enough had been allocated to the programme meant to boost the nutrition of children from poor families.

Earlier this year, a social media user claimed his grandson was served a packet of plain rice, some gravy, a shred of carrot and one or two florets of cauliflower. As the picture of the meal made its way through social media, the ministry pledged to investigate the matter.

Malaysia School Canteen Operators Association president Khairuddin Hamzah said the ministry should raise the allocation that has stagnated at RM2.50 per day per student for Peninsular Malaysia and RM3 for Sabah and Sarawak since 2015.

He said since the pandemic, a third of the 10,000 canteen operators had quit, and if the per meal allocation was not raised to RM4 and RM4.50 respectively, another 1,000 would have to close shop by year-end.

Khairuddin said operators would go bust if they had to follow the programme's 25 menus that served either chicken or eggs in each meal with various vegetables and fruits, at the current rate and portions.

"Such a rate in this economy is unreasonable, how are we expected to survive? On average even before the current inflation,



A canteen worker preparing packs of chicken rice for a school's Food Supplementary Programme in Melaka in 2016. Rising prices of food mean canteen operators struggle to provide nutritious meals. (Inset) Khairuddin Hamzah FILE PIC



we were spending RM3 and above for these meals," he said.

He said the rising price of chicken and eggs almost wiped out any profit the operators could earn from their tender.

"I can still make something because less than 10 per cent of the students are under this programme. The situation is similar for operators in Putrajaya, but for operators handling schools with a high number of students under this programme, including from the Orang Asli and Special Education Schools, it's impossible.

"Operators have no option, if the schools have kids under the programme we have to feed them, that is in the terms for our tender, so what else can we do besides hang up our aprons and look for money elsewhere?"

Earlier, the *New Straits Times* reported that operators were cutting down on the use of chicken for paying students. However, Khairuddin said it was impossible to tweak the menu or change portions and ingredients as teachers checked all meals prepared. He also said if an operator wanted to tweak the meal, they had to get the endorsement of the parent-teacher association.

"Schools that feel their FSP students have been shortchanged have the right to report these operators and suspend their pay-

ment for food under the programme."

He said he looked into the circumstances surrounding the controversial picture of the FSP food box containing plain noodles and believed the picture was taken when the operator was preparing the meal.

"That's why the other compartments (in the food box) were empty," he said.

Twitter user "Izwar Awani" who first shared the photo claimed that it was from a primary school in Pahang, saying that the principal and canteen owner had been warned but to no avail.

The thread was also responded to by a "Sarah", who shared a photo of a meal of rice, chicken and watermelon given to children in Sarawak.

"Asmodeus" questioned if the ministry wanted operators to lose money.

"They don't even get back their capital this way. The policy has never been reviewed? This is why many canteen operators have quit."

The FSP menus can be viewed at www.moe.gov.my/pekeliling/3570-spk-bt-19-rancangan-n-makana-tambahan-rmt-di-sekolah-rendah/file.

Based on the circular it has been in effect since July 17, 2020.