



Volunteers serving food to break fast at Universiti Sains Malaysia's Masjid Al-Malik Khalid, in George Town on Wednesday.
PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

'HAPPY AND PROUD'

NON-MUSLIMS VOLUNTEER IN USM'S FREE IFTAR INITIATIVE

Participants in 10-year-old initiative help Muslim friends pack 'buka puasa' food during Ramadan

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UNIVERSITI Sains Malaysia's Masjid Al-Malik Khalid here has opened its doors to Muslims and non-Muslims throughout Ramadan, offering them free meals to break fast.

Every day since the start of Ramadan, 25 university staff, students and mosque committee members would volunteer at the mosque kitchen to pack meals for about 2,500 people.

Among them are non-Muslim students who joined their Muslim friends to help pack the meals.

The *New Straits Times* visited the mosque kitchen on Wednesday, and found first-year student Yong Zhi Shuang, 20, and third-year student Kottham Lakshman, 23, hard at work.

Yong, a student at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, said this was her first time helping to pack food for the daily iftar programme in the mosque compound.

She said when the university's student representative council called for volun-

teers, she immediately put her name on the list.

"I am happy and proud that as a student of USM, I have a chance to work with others to help during this fasting month.

"I told myself that if my Muslim friends, who are fasting, can pack meals for some 2,500 people, including the less fortunate, for the breaking of fast, why can't I then?"

"It is nice to work with everyone here. Whether you are a Muslim, Chinese, Hindu or Christian, it doesn't matter. You are first a human being," she said.

The Selangor-born had previously volunteered to pack meals for students isolated at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

She also joined her Muslim friends in fasting on weekdays.

"In fact, I got up this morning (Wednesday) to join my Muslim friends from the Desasiswa Cahaya Gemilang for *sahur* and am fasting throughout the day.

"I am excited to break fast with everyone later," she said, explaining that fasting was nothing new to her.

"You see, I was a sekolah menengah kebangsaan student. Back then, I joined my Muslim friends in fasting.

"I want to feel what my Muslim brothers and sisters experience when fasting. And when I see them go the extra mile to help during this time, I feel even more motivated."



Yong Zhi Shuang

School of the Arts student, Kottham said this was his first time helping during Ramadan.

"I want to join in helping my Malay friends as I love the spirit of volunteerism.

"Secondly, as a student leader, I need to show that everyone is equal, and more importantly, we are not racist.

"This is where USM gives us the opportunity to prove ourselves," said the deputy vice-president 3 of the university's student representative

council.

Kottham, also from Selangor, said when he first entered the mosque, he did not know what to expect.

"I was eager and wanted to know what was going on. And when I was able to help the volunteers here pack the meals, I felt extremely excited and happy."

Meanwhile, USM's Iftar Sukarelawan 2022 coordinator Mohamad Hariz Abdul Razak said the free meal programme had been going on for 10 years.

He said the programme's approach was to involve everyone from the university.

"We want the people to know that the USM mosque is not only for the Muslims but open to all.

"By roping in non-Muslims, they can experience and have a better understanding of the Muslim's fasting practice, as well as the wisdom behind it," said Hariz.



Kottham Lakshman