

<p>Sunday March 15, 2009
CONTRADICTORY By DZOF AZMI</p><p></p><p>Waste not, want not </p><p>so the saying goes. In these times of economic crisis, that's exactly what Malaysians should remember the next time they're tempted to pile their plates with food they cannot finish.</p><p>EVER wondered why the rats in KL are so fat? I'm not using a metaphor, I'm talking about the real urban rats. Those furry rodents the size of a small cat that stare you in the eye if you turn around the wrong corner in Bangsar. They're not scared of you </p><p>in fact they dare you to take another step forward. </p><p>Have you seen how big they are? They lead a good life on the food and garbage, growing large on an irresistible diet of nasi lemak and roti canai scraps. I've always wondered if they suffered from high blood pressure or cholesterol. That would be a nice way to control the rat population. <p>But we have to face it, they are a product of our own wastage.</p><p>It's true. If Malaysians did not throw away so much food whenever they ate, then there wouldn't be that much rubbish for the rats to feed on. It's good stuff we leave out there in the streets.</p><p>Seeing all this going to waste is something that really upsets me. When I was young, not wasting was one of the things that was repeatedly drummed into my head. My grandfather constantly reminded me that toothpaste should be squeezed out from the end, not the middle, to make sure every single bit was used. For food, it was a very simple formula: don't put more food than you can eat onto your plate; and finish everything that you do take.</p><p>I never quite figured out why this was so important, I just assumed that times were harder before and food was hard to come by.</p><p>So I never understood why people load up unnecessarily during buffets and leave still-heaped plates on their tables when they finish. Or, they take a lot of something they don't know they'll like, and leave it behind when they've decided.</p><p>I feel like running up to them and grabbing the food on their plate and shoving it into their mouths, screaming </p><p>Why did you take this if you weren't going to eat it?</p><p>It's probably a good thing that I don't always act on my first impulse.</p><p>I think most Malaysians don't think they are wasteful. In fact, they probably think that they are pretty thrifty on the whole, always try to find the best bargains around. I've written before how Malaysians would rather drive around for hours looking for a parking spot than to pay for a place in a covered area. Or how it's worth finding that detour to avoid paying a RM1 toll. When they don't have, Malaysians will fight tooth and nail to get the best bargain possible.</p><p>The problem is when we have. We seem to be oblivious about the value of things if it doesn't cost a lot of money. So, yes, pile your plate high with oysters and prawns at a buffet, but leave that mee mamak half-eaten that you nibbled at when peckish at tea-time.</p><p>What we don't seem to appreciate is that what used to be plentiful can dwindle and suddenly become an inconvenient necessity. I remember when you could walk into any restaurant in Malaysia and get water to drink for free. Now they are beginning to charge 50 sen per glass. The first time it happened to me, I remember I protested on principle that water should be considered a free resource. Now I buy bottled water brands that fight for my attention with promises of being genuinely </p><p>mineral.</p><p>Subsidies don't help the situation. I sometimes feel that the Malaysian rakyat has been spoiled by the Government bearing part of their burden. When goods are subsidised, they are cheaper than they should be, and we underestimate their value. Remember: we don't appreciate what's cheap.</p><p>Now the Government is subsidising basic goods to the additional tune of RM674mil as part of the recent stimulus package. This isn't really as much as it might seem, because it only works out to about RM30-something per Malaysian over a single year. Yet, I feel that if Malaysians were only a little bit less wasteful, if </p>

for example ♦ they finished that half-eaten plate of rice once a week, then we would have easily covered that cost.</p><p>The Government could spend those hundred of millions of ringgit on other, more basic infrastructure programmes. Such as building roads, or schools. (Or even more walkways in KL, but that♦s another story.)</p><p>Look, the truth is we♦ve never really been in a crisis in Malaysia for a long time. We don♦t remember the hard times.</p><p>If you visit Cambodia, you♦ll notice a lot of strange food served by the roadside. Among the more interesting culinary choices are beetles and spiders. The thing is, Cambodians didn♦t traditionally eat these kinds of food. It was only when the Khmer Rouge took over and food was scarce did people push themselves to try otherwise unpalatable alternatives.</p><p>Even when the Khmer was defeated, they still turned to these more economical foods when times were bad, such as last year. Livestock became more valuable as farm labour compared with petrol-guzzling tractors. So instead of paying more for a bit of beef, they chose to pay less for a rat. And they lived well enough on that.</p><p>At least if things go from bad to worse here, we may not have a rat problem any more.</p><p>Source: http://thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2009/3/15/lifefocus/3473416&sec=lifefocus</p>