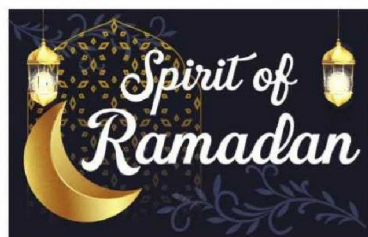




Padang Perbandaran MPAJ is located right next to the Ramadan bazaar. — Photos: SHAARI CHEMAT, YAP CHEE HONG and CHAN TAK KONG/ The Star

Breaking fast with dash of community spirit

More flocking to outdoor venues for iftar gatherings in Klang Valley



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DATARAN Merdeka is a popular spot to break fast among city dwellers, and the numbers keep growing.

As the sun set and daylight faded at the historical square in Jalan Raja, Kuala Lumpur, the chatter quieted down as the thousands of Muslims who had gathered there tucked into their meals.

Soon, the atmosphere turned lively again as conversations resumed and smartphones were taken out to capture the moment.

Among those who made their way there during the weekend were Durratul Najihah Imran, 15, and three of her classmates who came from Bandar Baru Sentul.

"We were doing our Hari Raya shopping at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (TAR) earlier and came here to break our fast.

"This is not our first time breaking fast in an open-air setting," said Durratul who took the LRT and brought along umbrellas for their *buka puasa* picnic.

Faizudin Mohamad, who came with his wife and four-year-old daughter from Kepong, brought foldable chairs and tables.

"We stopped to buy food while on the way here," he said.

He added that they planned on shopping at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman afterwards.



The historic square of Dataran Merdeka is popular with Muslims as a venue to break fast.

Faizudin said breaking fast at the square was a departure from their usual routine.

"We usually break fast at home.

"It is nice to do something different for a change," he said.

Muhammad Fadhil Haron, who came with three co-workers from Puchong in Selangor, bought food from nearby eateries.

"We left home at 5.30pm and were worried when it began to rain.

"Had the rain continued, we would have gone to a restaurant to break our fast.

"The inclement weather turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it meant a smaller crowd and cooler temperature," he said.

His colleague, Muhammad Irfan Mohd Asri, was thankful

for the mobile *surau* placed in the area.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) had prepared the facility on weekends during Ramadan in anticipation of bigger crowds.

There was also a tent placed just outside to accommodate more people for prayers.

Friends Nur Sabrina Sabirin and Qurratul Ain Zaska said Dataran Merdeka's central location made it a convenient place to break fast.

"We thought about going to Dataran Putrajaya but that is too far.

"We brought battery-powered fans, umbrellas and a mat.

"We regularly break fast at public parks, so we came prepared," said Nur Sabrina who came from Setiawangsa via LRT.

Shah Nizam Ahmad learned about the *buka puasa* at Dataran Merdeka online.

He came with his wife, daughter and four-month-old baby from Cheras.

"This is our first time breaking fast in an open area like this," he added.

Convenient location

As the Pandan Indah Ramadan bazaar wound down, the adjacent Padang Perbandaran MPAJ was starting to buzz with activity.

Mengkuang mats were rolled out as people gathered to unpack food and drinks purchased from the bazaar earlier for *iftar*.

The field is a popular spot with nearby residents and bazaar visitors to break their fast in an open-air setting.

Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) has prepared dates, mats and praying areas for the people's convenience.

During *StarMetro*'s visit on a weekday, a group of 20 caught



Muhammad Irfan (left), Muhammad Fadhil and their fellow colleagues came from Puchong to buka puasa at Dataran Merdeka.



During Ramadan, Dataran Putrajaya is known as Laman Buka Puasa.



MPAJ staff (left) handing out a picnic mat to visitors at Padang Perbandaran MPAJ.



Faizudin, with his wife and daughter brought foldable chairs and tables to Dataran Merdeka.



Fahmi with his wife and daughters in their little tent at Dataran Putrajaya.

everyone's attention as they conversed animatedly while waiting to break fast.

One of them, Khaw Kel Vin, said they were colleagues working at a physiotherapy clinic nearby.

He said the group decided to experience fasting for the day and breaking fast together.

"We want to support our Muslim colleagues during Ramadan.

"This is the first time we are doing this, hopefully it can become a yearly thing," he told *StarMetro*.

For sisters Nurul Diyanah Mohd Azmi and Nurul Nabilah, breaking their fast at the field is a yearly affair.

"During Ramadan, we will probably *buka puasa* here about 10 times if the weather is good.

"It has a nice ambience and is quite spacious," said Diyanah.

The Pandan Indah residents added that the field's proximity to the Ramadan bazaar made it even more convenient.

Faridzuan Ghani and his family opted to break fast at the field for a change of scenery.

"We usually cook at home or eat in restaurants.

"This is also a budget-friendly option as the bazaar food is affordable," he said.

Bandar Baru Ampang resident Muhammad Ishak Mohd Hamid said he and his family would typically break fast at the spot two to four times during Ramadan.

He said it was nice to be around other families, minus the usual distractions at home.

"There is also the convenience of a hand washing station and prayer space," he added.

Picnicking in Putrajaya

Every year, hundreds gather at Dataran Putrajaya in Precinct 3 to break fast overlooking the Perbadanan Putrajaya (PPJ) and Palace of Justice buildings.

Putrajaya Corporation corporate communication director Norzita Abdul Razak said there were five Ramadan bazaars in the administrative capital.

"Many people will buy food from the bazaars and picnic in the area, which takes on the temporary name of Laman Berbuka Puasa during Ramadan.

"It is a conducive spot because it is close to the biggest Ramadan bazaar in Putrajaya as well as Anjung Syawal, where visitors can do their Hari Raya shopping.

"It is also convenient because the public can use the toilet and *surau* at the Perbadanan Putrajaya building," she said.

Anticipating an increase in rubbish, Norzita said PPJ had workers on standby to clear the bins promptly.

"So far, the picnickers have been cleaning up after themselves," she said.

Fahmi Muhammad, from Precinct 5, was there with his wife and two daughters.

His wife went to buy food for *buka puasa* while he set up a small tent.

"It is nice to *buka puasa* in a different setting and spend quality time with my family," he said.

A group of undergraduates from Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia were also spotted at the site.



Khaw (right) with his colleagues setting up their *buka puasa* spot in Pandan Indah.

"We heard that the Ramadan bazaar here has a good variety. We came here by public transport from our Sungai Besi campus," she said.

Putrajaya Sub Zone 3 Federal Territory Residents Representative Council chairman Zarina Ismail said the field had always been a popular spot for community events.

"Anjung Floria and Taman Saujana Hijau are other spots people like to *buka puasa* at, but this place can accommodate more people," she said.



Nur Amelia (right) spending time with her varsity friends (from left) Nur Syahirah Kamaruddin, Nur Aliah Najihah Annuar, Nor Erin Allysha Hazami, Nur Hanami Saarani, Siti Nuraisyah Mohd Asri and Noor Farah Nadhirah Ibrahim at Dataran Putrajaya.