

No plastic found in pisang goreng

KUALA LUMPUR : If you love *pisang goreng* and have been worried due to recent news of our local fritters being coated with melted plastics and bottles, worry no more.

The Health Ministry's Food Safety and Quality Division has assured the public that their preliminary investigations have revealed no such results.

It's director, Noraini Dato' Mohd Othman, said samples of frying oil and fritters such as fried banana and *keropok lekor*, were being analysed by the Chemistry Department.

She said preliminary results showed that the plastic materials were not detected in the fritters.

"Nevertheless, more samples will be analysed especially from other States and the results would be available soon".

On Feb 29, *New Straits Times* highlighted consumers' concern in Johor Baru, alleging that big demand for fritters had caused hawkers to coat these fried snacks with plastic, creating a health scare.

E-mails had sent out warnings o people to keep away from consuming extra crispy fried snacks or chicken. The e-mails claimed that some hawkers had allegedly been seen adding plastic straws and bottles into boiling oil before frying the fritters.

The trend allegedly started in Thailand for frying *ikan bilis* and onions before spreading to Kedah and the rest of the country.

In a letter sent to the newspaper on March 24, a reader from Johor Baru wrote that he had witnessed the same incident at a wet market in Larkin, Johor Baru, last year.

He claimed that, despite complaining to the Johor Baru City Council, the hawker was still committing the offence.

In another letter by Consumer Association of Penang president S.M. Mohamed Idris, published on Thursday, he had called on the Health Ministry to investigate the matter thoroughly.

Weekend Mail had contacted Noraini's department following the media reports and she said the ministry viewed these allegations seriously.

"Colorants, additives, preservatives and plasticizers in the plastic materials are very toxic and the public might be at risk if these materials are ingested. When the plastic is heated, it may melt and degrade into the frying oil, releasing all its components.

"Consumers should boycott vendors of such practices", she said.

In general, plastics are made of long chain polymer, colorants and other additives. More additives are added to the plastic formula to control the physical properties of the plastic, she said.

"Plastic bottles are made of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and plastic straws are made from a formulated blend of polypropylene, plastic resin, colorants and other additives.

"General toxicity and genotoxicity studies on PET indicated that this material does not pose a threat to human health".

She said the ministry will step up its enforcement activities but the public should also alert the ministry through the nearest health authority.