

## MY SAY: What is life without 'potong'?

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When I was little, one of the joys of life was to wait for the ice cream "potong" man. Things were so simple that it was a thrill to just pick from the variety of flavours, including my all-time favourite durian. I can still picture the rectangular ice cream "potong" stuck on a rounded bamboo stick that brought so much happiness to children those days.

It cost 10 sen for the whole piece and five for half. For loyal customers, it was possible to get two different flavours in each half with no increase in cost. This, of course, was the preserve of a few.

Over time, this kind of ice cream came to be known by the endearing word "potong". No multi-million-ringgit advertising and promotional campaign was needed. "Potong" was an experience in itself.

Lately, this kind of ice cream has made a comeback but it is not the same anymore. It is so prim and proper, all wrapped up in distinctive paper and with the word "potong" emblazoned on it. The act of "potong" — which is the experience — is altogether missing! Where have those simple days gone?

Today, there is a new "potong" experience. This time it is about cars, not ice cream. Friends insist that the car I am driving is a "potong" version. They say it is not the safest car in the garage, it being a "potong" version of the standard type. Additional pieces of metal are allegedly welded together to make the car look longer, or to use the word of the maker, "executive".

It has its advantages though — ample legroom which allows it to be converted into a mobile office of sorts. In that sense, the "kereta potong" is productive and comfortable. So long as one does not drive it (or any car for that matter) recklessly, one should be happy with his "potong" car.

Still, motor vehicle authorities should ensure that the "potong" car is truly safe and roadworthy. Who knows, "potong" could be the name of the next car model, capitalising on its other meaning: to overtake speedily.

"Potong" could be popularised as another brand and experience of superior driving, with its own set of loyal customers, just like the ice-cream. Imagine an advertisement revolving around the word "potong" appearing on your television screen depicting an exclusive automobile.

In fact, there was one such ad recently, but not involving an automobile, that quickly became the talk of the town, much like Lat's handiwork. It soon became a rallying point, cutting through barriers that we would otherwise be very conscious about. This particular advertisement creatively turned the word "potong" into something therapeutic through its ability to apparently downsize (potong?) many of those so-called barriers. Indeed, there are those who confess that they look forward to seeing the "potong" ad after a hard day's work. Incidentally, a serious meeting last weekend spontaneously exploded into a hearty laughing session as soon as one member spoke about the need to "potong" our expenditure!

Unfortunately, unlike the "potong" car that is still very much on the road despite the alleged dangers, the "potong" ad is now under threat. Efforts to get it "potong" from the air are real. In fact, there have been heated debates about it, even in Parliament — not that such frivolous issues have not come before our Parliament before.

If the issue is about the word "potong" being vulgar, we have heard worse things being uttered, even in the august House of Representatives (at times without so much as an apology), and reported widely in the press. If it is about cultural sensitivity, again, it is similar to Lat's cartoon, with its "let's laugh it off and move on" effect. Unless, of course, there is an ulterior motive, some business jealousy, since this ad is getting so much attention from people from all walks of life and all age groups. Perhaps, the competitors are wary and are already feeling the pinch.

So, is another "potong" experience on the verge of demise? Looks like it!

Do not despair, however, since like all good "brands", jokes and ideas take on a life of their own. Unlike its regular meaning, the word "potong" has a way of coming back into our stressful lives. Ask anyone if he is looking forward to that day and I bet his answer will be: "Of course!"

Meanwhile, thank you "potong" for humouring us.

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