**FAST FOOD**

In the studies carried out on the eating places frequented by families with children, studies have shown what is obvious. In Malaysia as well as other Asian countries, fast food chains and takeaway outlets are the most popular places for buying a full meal or snack, particularly for families with children below eighteen. Restaurants are the second most frequently visited outlets. They are strongly patronized by those in the higher income brackets. Cafes are the third, followed by clubs and hotels.

Retail sales of fast food and takeaways have increased tremendously in the last few years. In the United States, between 1998 and 2002, sales increased at an annual rate of three per cent. Growth in fast food and takeaways is expected to an average 1.5 per cent per annum these years. However, the major chains are expected to have an average growth of 5.7 per cent per annum through the introduction of new marketing strategies such as more comprehensive menus and a surge of smaller stores in shopping centers, hospitals and convenience stores.

It is also a fact that many consumers have shifted some of their food budget from fast food to prepared products, either those ready to heat or requiring little cooking. as a result, most meal solution products except for some mass-produced home meal replacements have registered remarkably high growth. Increased demand for such products such as washed salad mixed, pasta sauces, fresh pasta, partly prepared meat and poultry products and raw stir fries is further evidence of consumer concern for a healthy diet.

The growth of the food industry is expected to accelerate in 2004 with stronger income growth, low interest rates and an improvement in consumer confidence. In the last three years, Malaysia's rapidly changing lifestyles and eating habits have resulted in a booming fast food industry. Malaysian consumers, especially those who live in large urban areas, have accepted Western-style fast food restaurants that serve French fries and other popular side dishes. As a result, the popular American food has become a huge success story, creating a growing market for American frozen potatoes. Since 1995, direct exports of French fries from the Untied States have increased tenfold. As more Asian consumers eat at Chinese fast food and Western-style restaurants such as McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, these numbers are expected to increase.

Today, French fries are a booming business in many Asian countries. Families visit fast food restaurants to please their children. In fact, when it comes to eating out, ***children are basically the decision makers***. Asian teenagers and young adults are no different from their counterparts in the United States. They enjoy the crispy taste of French fries along with other types of fast food.

The United States with a 97-per cent market share, dominate the Asian market for French fries. In 1997, the United States exported about 2500 metric tons of frozen French fries to China valued at $2.2 million. It is estimated that another 8000 to 14000 metric tons of French fries or 50 per cent to 75 per cent are shipped to china through Hong Kong. Likewise, Malaysian consumption of French fries explains the increasing import of this food product from the United States.

**Comprehension activity**

Answer the questions below after reading the text.

1. Where is the most popular eating place by Malaysia’s families?
2. What has research shown about fast food eateries?
3. Give two reasons for the rapid sale of fast food.
4. In what two ways are prepared products convenient?
5. Give two reasons for the fast growing food industry in Malaysia.
6. Explain what is meant by *children are basically the decision makers*.

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