



EDITORIAL

SEAblings power

**S**trives of employment encounters with tacit treatment in South Korea have long circulated quietly among travelers, students and migrant workers from Southeast Asia. But what was once sporadic and largely anecdotal has now eroded into a loud, undeniable issue as these experiences have been thrust into the spotlight via heated exchanges on social media.

The latest flare-up stemmed from a K-pop concert in Malaysia, when a South Korean "fan mixer" was caught bringing in professional cameras in violation of an existing ban, sparking online criticism. This quickly escalated into racist attacks by some South Korean netizens, or "Knetz", who mocked the facial features and darker skin tones of people from Southeast Asian countries.

In response, the region's netizens rallied together under the #SEAblings (Southeast Asian siblings) movement, a hashtag that gained regional prominence last September following the protests in Indonesia, to assert Southeast Asian solidarity and push back against online racism.

The movement eventually called for a boycott of South Korea's cultural exports, including K-dramas, K-pop, movies, fashion and K-beauty. The cultural exports have even become the country's major economic driver and ranked fourth in 2017 behind semi-conductors, automobiles and petrochemicals.

Beyond their commercial impact, cultural products are also a key pillar of South Korea's soft diplomacy, helping to cement its global influence. Southeast Asia remains a huge market for K-culture. Aside from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand consistently rank among the world's top K-pop and K-drama audiences, particularly on social media.

Given this massive consumption power, the renewed SEAblings movement is encouraging viewers to explore alternative entertainment, including local and regional television series and movies as well as productions from other Asian countries like China, which are steadily gaining popularity across ASEAN countries.

Indonesia in particular is home to one the most passionate fan bases, underscoring its importance for creators.

The backlash has prompted several Korean creators to issue public apologies, emphasizing that there is no justification for racism.

One creator even addressed online backlash in Indonesia, while another noted that many South Koreans respected and felt a strong connection to Indonesia, and that the racist discriminatory behavior did not reflect a majority view. He also urged other Knetz who posted negative comments to practice self-reflection, warning that racist remarks could escalate tensions and even harm bilateral relations.

At its core, the SEAblings movement is more than a fan-led boycott. It is a powerful signal of the importance of cross-cultural respect in an increasingly interconnected world.

Southeast Asia has long been a major market of the so-called Korean Wave, or Hallyu, but this region also wields influence and authority in shaping global entertainment trends.

Left unchecked, racial discrimination and cultural insensitivity risk eroding the goodwill that South Korea has spent years in building while opening the door for other players to attract regional audiences.

The stakes are both cultural and economic: Platforms streamlining Korean content in Southeast Asia reported a drop in engagement at the height of the online dispute, showing how quickly regional consumers can exert social and financial pressure.

The takeaway is understandable: Mutual respect carries significant weight globally. In an era when people-to-people exchanges transcend physical borders, fostering cross-cultural understanding is no longer a courtesy. It is a requisite for success.

K-culture and the broader Hallyu ecosystem have established a bond with global recognition, but maintaining this requires more than just exportation. It also demands cultural sensitivity, inclusivity and respect for all audiences.

Southeast Asia's netizens have sent a strong message that racism, in any form, will hurt both reputations and markets alike.

# When the moons align: Lunar New Year, Lent and Ramadan

**I**n 2020, the Gregorian calendar witnesses a rare and profound confluence of major cultural and religious observances: the Lunar New Year on Feb. 7, Ash Wednesday on Feb. 18 and the start of Ramadan Feb. 18 to 19. This overlap creates an unprecedented, extended period of fasting, reflection and celebration that transcends faith communities and cultural boundaries.

As the Islamic lunar calendar is roughly 11 days shorter than the solar one, Ramadan rotates through the seasons over a 35-year cycle. When this cycle aligns with the lunisolar Chinese calendar and the Gregorian-based Latin West, it creates a unique cultural moment that is particularly influential in Southeast Asia, where diversity brings high consumer demand for both festive goods and spiritual fulfillment simultaneously.

The concurrent observance of Lent and Ramadan in 2020 fosters deeper transnational relationships and respects by highlighting shared values of prayer, charity and self-restraint while these traditions have different origins. Their overlap highlights a shared humanity and creates a level of interfaith solidarity that transcends mere coexistence toward active brotherhood.

Both Christian and Islamic traditions involve fasting, which creates a common, lived experience of sacrifice for the good and virtuous. This shared spiritual time encourages solidarity through joint community service initiatives, shared meals and respect, ultimately bridging deep historical and religious divides and replacing negative narratives with those of knowledge and common humanity.

This year, solidarity is taking the form of a public expression of common values, bridging the gap between the pious, the average and the fervent faith. In many urban centers, we are seeing the rise of "compassion kitchens" where Christians reach out to Muslims, and vice versa, preparing for both Lenten fasting and the holy month.

In local neighborhoods, "zero-waste" Lenten dinners are set alongside Ramadan gatherings, creating both spiritual and practical support. These initiatives serve as a social fabric that brings people of all backgrounds together, resulting in the goodness of the "values" as they are lived out.

This year alignment also creates a combined, high-consumption season that presents both opportunities and challenges for the economy. Consumers can explore their spending patterns, often shifting their spending priorities toward eco-friendly purchases.



Neighborhoodly communion: Volunteers distribute food to Muslim community members for their on April 18, 2020, at the Ghuras Muslim Temple in Taman Sari, West Jakarta.

By Shafa Elmiraena

A professor of religious studies at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (STK) Yogyakarta

Shared meals simultaneously for Lenten New Year staples like vegetable soups and pasta alongside Ramadan staples like dates and green lentils, showcase the high volume of activity, moments are increasingly value-conscious due to economic pressures, showing a marked preference for discounts and direct-to-consumer.

Consumers are adapting by exploring their needs for logistics and customer service, including late-night and post-holiday activities to match their shopping patterns. This economic adaptability reflects a deeper social resilience, as businesses learn to navigate multiple timelines, they contribute to a culture of respect and awareness that transcends religious boundaries.

**Inclusivity is fostered through shared meals, such as the production of halal-certified Lunar New Year dishes and festive desserts that cater to multiple backgrounds.**

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The final landscape is shifting significantly to accommodate these dual needs. I encourage

The Jakarta Post

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## Fasting month: A shared spiritual season for Indonesia

**I**ndonesia, a nation celebrated for its religious diversity, finds itself in 2020 experiencing a rare spiritual convergence. The Christian season of Lent and the Islamic holy month of Ramadan unfold almost simultaneously this year.

For many believers, this overlap is a matter of liturgical coincidence, but for Indonesians as a whole, it represents a profound moment of shared discipline, reflection and solidarity. It serves as a poignant reminder that beyond doctrinal differences lies a common human longing for spiritual, compassion and unity.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, when Christians receive ashes on their foreheads as a sign of humility and mortality. The season stretches for 40 days, culminating in the joyous Easter.

Traditionally, Lent is observed by three pillars: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. In this context, fasting is not merely abstaining from food, but a spiritual exercise in self-control. Prayer deepens the believer's relationship with the Divine, while almsgiving cultivates compassion, urging Christians to share with the marginalized.

The journey culminates in Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection, symbolizing hope's victory over despair.

Similarly, for Muslims, Ramadan is the most sacred month of the year, commencing the crescent moon of the Quran from dawn to dusk. Believers abstain from food, drink and temporal distractions.

Yet this fast is not merely physical; it teaches patience, humility and empathy. Through



By Bernarfen Agus Bakhyanto

An associate professor at Sunan Djember University, Yogyakarta

fast and almsgiving, the blessings of Ramadan extend to the whole community, reinforcing bonds of solidarity during the holy month. The month marks its peak in Idul Fitri, a joyous festival of forgiveness and gratitude.

While these seasons vary from different theological traditions, their essence is strikingly similar. Both are periods of voluntary sacrifice that nurture justice to reform the heart. This resonates as that true faith is not measured by ritual alone, but by the capacity to change hearts and improve society in real time.

This simultaneous observance offers Indonesia a unique "spiritual Indonesia." As Grand

Imam of Binjai Mosque and Islamic Center of Binjai, Indonesia (IIB) said, "Lent is not passive acceptance but active pursuit, a recognition of the inherent dignity of others. This moment renews the spirit of Indonesia's founding fathers who sacrificed the nation in Pancasila. In that spirit, let us find, amidst the complexity of both while ensuring space for diverse expressions."

The late Abdurrahman "Dus Dur" Wahid, former president and leader of Nahdlatul Ulama, once remarked that religion should be a source of peace, not division. In the same vein, Catholic archbishop Vincent Sagran

em argues that Indonesia's success lies in its ability to embrace diversity without succumbing to antagonism.

When Lent and Ramadan coincide, they breathe life into these philosophies through their shared observance.

First, shared empathy. Experiences during Lenten fasting or unique cross-community understanding. When citizens of different faiths observe simultaneously, they gain a deeper appreciation for one another's commitments beyond their own. The discipline and honesty cultivated during these seasons align perfectly with the moral tenets of Pancasila, nurturing citizens who are both religiously devout and socially responsible.

Second, transcommunal generosity. In a nation where poverty remains a challenge, the combined impact of almsgiving and zakat can materially reduce suffering.

Third, shared empathy. Experiences during Lenten fasting or unique cross-community understanding. When citizens of different faiths observe simultaneously, they gain a deeper appreciation for one another's commitments beyond their own. The discipline and honesty cultivated during these seasons align perfectly with the moral tenets of Pancasila, nurturing citizens who are both religiously devout and socially responsible.

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Sharing harmony: A large crowd of Muslims performs a mass prayer for Idul Adha (Day of Sacrifice) on June 8, 2020, in the great surrounding Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, East Jakarta.

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# Fasting month: A shared spiritual season for Indonesia



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Yogyakarta

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Indonesia, a nation celebrated for its religious diversity, finds itself in 2026 experiencing a rare spiritual convergence. The Christian season of Lent and the Islamic holy month of Ramadan unfold almost simultaneously this year.

For many believers, this overlap is a matter of liturgical calendars, but for Indonesia as a whole, it represents a profound moment of shared discipline, reflection and solidarity. It serves as a poignant reminder that beneath doctrinal differences lies a common human longing for renewal, compassion and justice.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, when Christians receive ashes on their foreheads as a sign of humility and mortality. The season stretches for 40 days, echoing Christ's period of fasting in the desert.

Traditionally, Lent is anchored by three pillars: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. In this context, fasting is not merely abstaining from food, but a spiritual exercise in self-control. Prayer deepens the believer's relationship with the Divine, while almsgiving embodies compassion, urging Christians to share with the marginalized. The journey culminates in Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection, symbolizing hope's victory over despair.

Similarly, for Muslims, Ramadan is the most sacred month of the year, commemorating the revelation of the Quran. From dawn to dusk, believers abstain from food, drink and temporal distractions.

Yet this fast is as moral as it is physical; it teaches patience, humility and empathy. Through

zakat and *sadaqah*, the blessings of Ramadan extend to the wider community, reinforcing bonds of solidarity during the nightly iftar. The month reaches its peak in Idul Fitri, a joyous festival of forgiveness and gratitude.

While these seasons arise from different theological narratives, their resonance is strikingly similar. Both are parallel journeys of transformation that master desire to redirect the heart. They remind us that true faith is not measured by ritual alone, but by the capacity to change hearts and inspire justice.

This simultaneous observance offers Indonesia a unique "spiritual laboratory". As Grand

Imam of Istiqlal Mosque and Religious Affairs Minister Nasaruddin Umar has noted, tolerance is not passive acceptance but active respect, a recognition of the inherent dignity of others. This sentiment echoes the vision of Indonesia's founding fathers, who anchored the nation in Pancasila. Its first principle, Belief in One God, affirms the centrality of faith while ensuring space for diverse expressions.

The late Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, former president and leader of Nahdlatul Ulama, famously believed that religion should be a source of peace, not division. In the same vein, Catholic scholar Franz Magnis-Suse-

no argues that Indonesia's success lies in its ability to embrace diversity without succumbing to sectarianism.

When Lent and Ramadan coincide, they breathe life into these philosophies through four key dimensions.

First, shared empathy. Experiencing fasting together fosters a unique cross-community understanding. When citizens of different faiths abstain simultaneously, they gain a deeper appreciation for one another's commitments.

Second, civic virtue. The discipline and honesty cultivated during these seasons align perfectly with the moral foundations of Pancasila, nurturing citizens who are both religiously devout and socially responsible.

Third, transformative generosity. In a nation where poverty remains a challenge, the combined impact of almsgiving and zakat can materially reduce in-

equality and foster a pervasive culture of care.

Fourth, collective resilience. Shared spiritual discipline reminds Indonesians that national unity is a moral and spiritual endeavor, providing the strength needed to face modern social and political challenges.

In a global climate often torn by religious conflict, Indonesia's experience serves as a model. While intolerance and divisive voices on social media still surface, this convergence offers a powerful counternarrative. It invites us to focus not on the boundaries that separate us, but on the values that bind us.

Educational institutions and religious leaders should seize this moment to promote inter-faith dialogue. Joint charitable initiatives and collaborative community projects would not dilute religious identities; rather, they would enrich them by showing that faith flourishes most when it serves humanity.

Indonesia's future depends on more than just economic growth; it requires moral and spiritual resilience. This convergence is a national blessing, calling us to embody the values of justice and solidarity that strengthen democracy. As Christians journey through Lent and Muslims through Ramadan, may the nation as a whole journey toward greater unity.

May fasting become not only an abstinence from food, but an abstinence from hatred. May prayer be translated not only into words to God, but into actions of justice. And may charity become more than just giving alms, may it become the act of building a society where no one is left behind.



**Sharing harmony:** A large crowd of Muslims performs a mass prayer for Idul Adha (Day of Sacrifice) on June 6, 2025, in the street surrounding Koinonia Church in Jatinegara, East Jakarta.



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# When Lent and Ramadan converge: A shared spiritual season for Indonesia

*As Indonesia experiences a rare spiritual convergence in 2026, the overlapping seasons of Lent and Ramadan offer a powerful "spiritual laboratory" to transform individual faith into a shared national strength.*

Bernardus Agus Rukiyanto (The Jakarta Post)

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