&#65533; KUALA LUMPUR: THE National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) has urged consumers to check the expiry dates of goods in their Hari Raya hampers. NCCC senior manager M. Matheevani said consumers should check the items, especially during festive seasons as unscrupulous retailers and traders often clear goods that that expired or close to expiry during this time.

"Just like when consumers are shopping for groceries they have to be sure of what is in the hampers. And those buying gifts for others should be extra careful," said Matheevani. "Hamper senders should try to choose the items themselves before having them gift wrapped," she said in response to Streets' queries on expired items being packed into hampers. She said the centre receives an average of 50 complaints yearly on expired products which&#65533; are usually food stuff and toiletries.While the NCCC had not received complaints on expired goods being packed into hampers, she however agreed that the method could be a good way for retailers to get rid of items that are close to expiry or have expired. She said it was the store's responsibility or the packaging company's responsibility to ensure that the items wrapped were not expired or close to expiry. "There should be at least a six-month window for the products which are mostly made up of canned food as well as biscuits, chocolates and toiletries."

She said supermarkets or the retailers' policy of saying that goods should be returned within a week was not applicable."Consumers have the right to return a product, especially if it has expired, of&#65533; low quality or&#65533; harmful to health. They also have a right to a cash refund," she said quoting Section 46 of the Consumer Protection Act of 1999.

She said gift service providers were also beholden to Section 23 of the Consumer Protection Act of 1999."There shall be a guarantee that the services will be carried out with reasonable care and skill. The service provider's failure to comply gives a complainant the right to seek a refund or compensation by taking the matter to court.They should also lodge a report&#65533; even if someone else had sent them the hamper. They should lodge reports with us if they are turned away by the supplier or the packaging outfit."

"There may be a lot of expired items packed this way and by highlighting the matter to us we will get to know how rampant the practice is and spread national awareness on it." &#65533;