

April 3 – 7 2013

## HINDUS CHEESED OFF

“MUSLIMS DON'T BUY FROM NON MUSLIMS”

MUSLIMS will not buy food from non Muslims.



**PICTURE: ZAIL SINGH Anak Kumar Neerpath and his daughter Nalika have sued Roman's Pizza for religious discrimination.**

That's the argument a well known national pizza outlet allegedly used to prevent a Hindu family from owning a franchise at a newly developed shopping centre in Chatsworth.

The family (Anak Neerpath, his wife, Kaskumarie and their daughter Nalika of Chatsworth ) has turned to the Equality Court to settle their dispute. They've also launched a R5 million

damages claim against Loannis Nicolakakis - Chief Executive Officer of Roman's Pizza for allegedly discriminating against them on religious grounds.

They also want a public apology from Nicolakakis. In court papers, Anak Neerpath claimed he and his family were prevented from running an outlet because they were Hindus.

"We planned to open in April. Our negotiations with Roman's Pizza began in May last year. The deal was terminated about two months ago. Nicolakakis believes that only Muslim owned Roman's Pizza halaal outlets are successful," said Neerpath.

"This kind of discrimination falls foul of our constitution. Nicolakakis is practising double standards. He is not Muslim but of Greek origin. Roman's Pizza supplies halaal products to its halaal outlets and the Muslim community supports them. We estimate that had our lease for five years, being approved, we would have made a profit of between R4 million and R5 million."

Attorney Raakesh Maharaj, acting for the Neerpaths said: "The South African National Halaal Authority does not discriminate in approving halaal certificates to non Muslims and Roman's Pizza has no lawful basis to do so. My clients are disappointed because they expended a great deal of time, effort and money on the business proposal."

Nicolakakis has opposed the matter. In court papers he said his company would not issue a public apology as no unfair discrimination or insult was made, given or intended.

"The Neerpaths are attempting to use the country's constitution and the court to embarrass and to extract money from Roman's Pizza.

"In an e-mail to Anak (Neerpath) on February 12, I said the offer had been retracted and that there no was commercial basis for the franchise agreement to be concluded. The e-mail also said the store had already been allocated.

"Furthermore, we insist on Muslim operators in our halaal outlets. This ensures that the outlet will be supported by Muslim customers. We tried operating a halaal branch in Phoenix with a non Muslim franchisee and it did not work out. The community did not trust the products produced there. I also informed Anak that we had other opportunities in KwaZuluNatal to discuss if he was still interested," said Nicolakakis.

According to Nicolakakis, Neerpath and his family did not suffer any monetary loss because no franchise agreement was in place.

"Their lease agreement was not approved. I deny that Anak, his wife and daughter were discriminated against on religious grounds.

"The failed Roman's Pizza outlet in Phoenix demonstrated that Muslims do not trust or have confidence in a non Muslim running a halaal outlet. The Neerpaths wanted the franchise to be a halaal one. That shows that they expected a significant number of Muslims to be customers of the halaal food. The reality is that Muslims will only trust halaal outlets run by Muslims," he said.

Ebi Lockhat, the public relations officer of the South African National Halaal Authority, said this was the first time his organisation had heard of the matter. "It will be difficult to make an informed statement without having seen the court papers," he added.

Ashwin Trikamjee, the president of the South African Maha Saba, said he could not comment because the matter was before the court.