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Citycism

THE video of two individuals grilling corn on a footpath adjacent to a zebra crossing in downtown Kuala Lumpur went viral on social media platform X (previously known as Twitter) last year, garnering hundreds of thousand of views and a slew of reposts and likes.

The corn sellers not only placed a makeshift stove in a public area but also nonchalantly fanned the fire under the corn, creating plumes of smoke in a high-traffic area as if it were their own backyard.

It did not take long for Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) officers to take action against these bold entrepreneurs.

The incident highlighted just how daring people can be when selecting locations for their business ventures in the city.

However, such audacity is not unique.

There are numerous other cases in Kuala Lumpur where individuals have chosen to conduct businesses in creative spots, despite the fact that it is illegal.

You can spot them plying their trade along public walkways, near traffic lights, at bus stops, under bridges or anywhere there is high traffic, making the space their own.

And the number is increasing each day as ordinary citizens explore micro businesses to earn an income.

Here in the capital city, issues commonly associated with street hawkers range from inconsiderate parking and traffic jam to hygiene and environmental issues as well as conflicts between licensed trad-

Finding balance between KL hawkers, regulations

Designated trade spaces, relocations can resolve conflict



DBKL enforcement officers removing equipment of roadside stalls set up next to a zebra crossing.

ers, illegal hawkers, City Hall and residents.

A case in point is the proliferation of illegal hawkers at Taman Tasik Titiwangsa, which became so bad that it resulted in DBKL having to set up mobile patrol beats around the lakeside to deter illegal traders.

However, are we not also to blame for this situation?

Have we never stopped along a busy road to buy *rojak* sold by a stall on the roadside, or enjoy a cup of *masala* tea at a stall set up near a traffic light junction?

I know many residents are thankful for the stalls giving us an easy way to have breakfast, tea or dinner.

In fact, some may even feel blessed to be able to take a short drive or walk down the road from where they live to enjoy *cendol* or *bubur cacar*.

But to others, your favourite *nasi lemak* aunty or *putu piring* uncle are a nuisance.

In fact, during the Titiwangsa raid, DBKL's Enforcement Department deputy director Mohd Hisham Izhar made a personal plea to residents not to support illegal traders in the neighbourhood.

Now, hawking is an integral part of Malaysian culture and street vendors are undeniably a crucial component of our economic fabric.

With effective management and regulation, street vendors have the potential to play a pivotal role in enhancing the tourism sector.

While the entrepreneurial spirit of roadside vendors is commendable, a balanced approach is necessary.

This involves creating designated spaces for hawkers, which would allow them to continue their trade without impinging on public spaces or causing inconvenience to others.

Such measures would not only preserve the rich tapestry of Malaysian street food culture but also ensure that it thrives in harmony with the evolving urban landscape.

This is why I support DBKL's decision to halt new licence applications for the 2024 Free Trade Zone (FTZ) programme, and instead they plan to relocate current licence holders to suitable areas.

By relocating vendors to more suitable venues, the policy aims to address public grievances over obstruction, hygiene and congestion, ensuring hawkers operate in settings that respect both tradition and contemporary urban life.

Through this directive, I hope the community will continue to patronise hawkers in their new, more fitting locations, thereby eliminating the practice of trading in unsuitable spots, thus keeping the overall urban environment clean and welcoming.