

Cleaners overwhelmed by food waste in Lebuah Pudu



A group feeding the homeless in front of a sign that prohibits food distribution in the area.

"WE CANNOT cope, there is just too much rubbish all the time," says a tired Alam Flora worker who has been cleaning the historic area in Lebuah Pudu, Kuala Lumpur.

This cleaner, who did not want to be named, was referring to the excessive amount of rubbish thrown by the homeless community either living or loitering in the area in search of food and handouts.

"About 90% of the rubbish here comes from discarded food packaging.

"The food is usually distributed to the homeless community by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals.

"Influencers come here as a way to feel pleased that they have done a good deed.

"They feel good when people run to them for food, give them a thumbs up and thank them profusely," he said.

However, these people do not stick around to clean up after the distribution, he added.

"They do not know if the food is being consumed nor do they realise that if the food isn't tasty, it ends up in the drains.

"When we tell them that they are not supposed to feed the homeless here, they get angry with us.

"I have seen groups arriving in big cars with video crews, taking pictures and videos to post on social media and show their 'charity work'," said the cleaner.

He said the people giving out food were unaware that 80% of it ended up in the bin.

"I have seen people take a

packet of *nasi goreng* with *telur mata kerbau* (fried egg), eat the egg and discard the fried rice," he said.

He also highlighted that the rise in the rat population was because of the high amount of food wastage.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) only allows the public to distribute food at the homeless shelter in Jalan Medan Tuanku 2.

The issue of homelessness in the city has been a challenge for DBKL for a long time.

Things went from bad to worse from April 2020, during the movement control order (MCO) to curb the Covid-19 pandemic.

The management of the homeless falls under the purview of the Welfare Department and Women, Family and Community Development Ministry.

In July 2020, the then Women, Family and Community Development minister Datuk Seri Rina Harun informed Parliament about the government's plan to review Destitute Persons Act 1977 to better address homelessness.

Rina reported that 1,238 homeless people were rescued during the MCO period, with 50% taken off the streets of Kuala Lumpur and the rest primarily from Johor and Sarawak.

However, current observations on the ground suggest that the number of homeless people in Kuala Lumpur has grown and is increasing daily. — By **BAVANI M**



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