

Restaurants say they need outside seating to compete with stalls



Customers gather around a food truck in Jalan Tun Sambanthan for a late night meal with tables and stools placed along the pavement.

IT'S a bustling Saturday night in Jalan Sultan, Kuala Lumpur.

At 11pm, the air is thick with the aroma of stir-fried noodles and sizzling meat as diners gather around makeshift tables and plastic stools.

Restaurant operators have taken over pavements and road shoulders, squeezing tables into every available space, forcing pedestrians onto the streets.

Once walkable pathways are now packed with diners, while cars inch forward through the congestion.

It is much the same in Brickfields, with eateries, hawkers and food truck operators claiming public walkways and roadside spaces, with little concern for regulations.

Jalan Tun Sambanthan and Jalan Thambipillai have effectively turned into open-air food courts, with tables spilling onto footpaths.

In some spots, diners sit inches from moving vehicles.

Despite Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) regulations prohibiting food trucks and hawkers from setting up tables and chairs in public spaces, enforcement officers say their hands are tied.

"If we take action against one, we're accused of bias. If we allow it, others demand the same treatment," a DBKL enforcement officer said on condition of anonymity.

Each time DBKL attempts enforcement, stall owners take to social media, portraying themselves as victims "just trying to make a living".

Brickfields is a good example. Food trucks have taken over the stretch in front of the post office in Jalan Tun Sambanthan, setting up tables in direct violation of their licensing conditions.

Attempts to clear the area are met with complaints and political pressure.

Meanwhile, Jalan Sultan and Jalan Petaling have morphed into massive outdoor food courts, with businesses also extending into the roads.

These illegal setups pose serious risks – people in wheelchairs, the elderly and parents with prams struggle to navigate these streets safely.

"It is a nightmare," said Independent Living and Training Centre Malaysia president G. Francis Siva, who



Naidu says pedestrians are at risk when tables and chairs on busy roads.



Francis is upset that furniture has taken over footpaths, leaving no space for wheelchair users.



Diners enjoying their meal outdoors along a public walkway in Brickfields.

is a quadriplegic.

"There is no space for wheelchair users because tables and chairs have taken over footpaths.

"It's dangerous, and no one seems to care," he said.

Brickfields resident SKK Naidu said traffic was bad as it is even without these issues.

"Now with food stalls taking up road space, it's worse. Cars can't move and pedestrians are at risk.

"It feels like DBKL has lost control of the streets," he added.

DBKL officers admit that despite laws granting them authority, they cannot act without prior approval from the licensing department.

"Most of the time, my job is just responding to complaints. We can't do anything without approval," said the enforcement officer.

When contacted, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's political secretary Datuk Azman Abidin said DBKL must act without fear or favour.

"They just have to do their

job. They are empowered to do so," he said, adding that the Prime Minister's Office had never issued orders to halt enforcement.

While DBKL struggles to rein in the city's illegal street dining scene, restaurant operators say their application for permits to place tables and chairs outside their premises have repeatedly been rejected by DBKL.

"We go through the proper channels, but our applications keep getting rejected.

"We need those tables to survive," said a restaurant operator in Petaling Street, claiming that roadside stalls set up tables freely without consequences.

The operator added that restaurants have to provide outdoor dining to compete with stalls.

"If DBKL won't give us the permit officially, we have to find other means to stay competitive," the operator added.

An operator in Brickfields said: "This is the reality of doing business in Kuala Lumpur." –

By BAVANI M