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Furniture junkyard

Eateries find it cheaper to replace seized items rather than reclaim them from Kuala Lumpur City Hall's storage depot. >2&3

Furniture junkyard

Mounting piles of seized items at a City Hall depot make a stark visual of Kuala Lumpur's persistent battle with illegal alfresco dining. Eateries find it cheaper to replace than reclaim confiscated belongings, creating a futile cycle of enforcement. >2&3



Filling up: Thousands of seized tables, chairs, food carts and other items placed at Kuala Lumpur City Hall's enforcement depot in Jalan Lombong, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star



DBKL officers issuing notices and tagging tables for removal outside a restaurant during an enforcement operation in Jalan Sultan. — Photos: CHAN TAK KONG, YAP CHEE HONG/The Star and courtesy pix

Seized items pile up amid KL crackdown on outdoor dining

Many tables, chairs, food carts go unclaimed at City Hall's Cheras depot

The Star EXCLUSIVE

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FROM the air, Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) enforcement depot in Jalan Lombong, Cheras, looks like a sprawling open-air warehouse, with row upon row of plastic chairs, foldable tables, canopies and food carts crammed into every available space.

Drone images reveal thousands of seized items at the facility, evidence of the scale of the city's battle against illegal open-air dining.

These confiscated items are the spoils of countless raids on eateries that persist in occupying public walkways, parking bays and roads without permits.

Yet despite frequent crackdowns, the same operators keep returning, often with backup furniture ready to roll out the moment enforcement officers leave.

According to a DBKL insider, it is far cheaper to replace the furniture than pay the fine.

"We impose a RM300 compound and a storage fee of RM5 for up to seven days.

"After that, it is 50sen per day. But at these rates, most operators don't bother to claim their items," the source said (*see graphics*).

"For them, it is cheaper and faster to replace a plastic table than go through the hassle of paying fines and collecting from the depot.

"They just buy new ones and carry on."

Another officer said that most operators only reclaimed their goods if they were worth more than RM300.

"If it is just some plastic chairs and foldable tables, they won't bother."

While some operators have been caught and fined multiple times, most return to the same spot.

In high-traffic areas like Jalan Petaling, Jalan Sultan, Brickfields and parts of Bukit Bintang, the problem is rampant.



Azman: Permanent enforcement or police beat being considered for dining hotspot areas.



Flashback to *StarMetro*'s cover story on April 25.

Some traders treat DBKL enforcement as little more than a temporary inconvenience.

"The moment we seize one set, they bring out another.

"It is a never-ending cycle, we confiscate, they replenish," said an officer.

Traders' justification

A trader in Jalan Petaling told *StarMetro* that furniture suppliers were quick to deliver replacements within an hour of a raid, ensuring business could resume almost immediately.

Restaurant operators say it is all about what customers want.

"We have plenty of tables inside, but most people still ask to sit outside," said an eatery owner in Jalan Sultan.

"Even when the place is empty, they will ask, 'Can we eat outside?'

"If we say no, they just head to the shop next door."

Another restaurant owner said tourists, in particular, loved to watch the goings-on in the street while they dined.

"They want the atmosphere, the noise, the smells, the sights. That is what they come for.

"If DBKL takes our tables, we just bring out new ones. We don't have a choice."

A hawker in Jalan Petaling said: "It is also cooler outside, especially in the evenings. People like the breeze."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's political secretary Datuk Azman Abidin said his office had received numerous complaints about traders encroaching onto public spaces, especially in tourist areas.

"They can easily make RM5,000 to RM6,000 a day operating outside their premises, so losing a few tables and chairs is a small price to pay," he said.

He added that permanent enforcement or a police beat was being considered for hotspot areas.

StarMetro had previously reported that unauthorised alfresco dining cost DBKL millions of ringgit annually in lost permit fees and deposits.

In the article on April 25, "Task force set up to curb illegal alfresco dining in", it was stated that only licensed eateries with approved "*Permit Meletak Kerusi Meja*" stickers issued by its Keja committee (*Mesyuarat Jawatankuasa Kelulusan Permit Kerusi Meja*) can place tables and chairs in public areas, subject to size, placement and operating hour limits.

Tables and chairs in carparks are prohibited, and walkways may only be used without obstructing public access.

From January to April, DBKL issued 3,094 violation notices and conducted 212 operations, seizing over 2,000 tables, 1,900 chairs and 1,500 other items.

Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif had said DBKL was forming a task force to identify designated zones for roadside dining, limited to areas with sufficient space and minimal traffic exposure.

She stressed that even licensed eateries would not be allowed to place tables and chairs indiscriminately, and unsuitable locations would remain clear of obstructions.

"Restaurants can apply for outdoor dining permits because alfresco dining is popular, but only certain areas qualify.

"Permission will come with strict conditions on location, activity and duration," she said.

However, no announcement has been made to date on the proposed zones or the task force's findings.







(Top) KL City Hall's enforcement storage depot in Jalan Lombong, Cheras, where seized tables, chairs and other items are kept.

(Left) DBKL officers confiscating tables and chairs placed along the walkway, during an enforcement operation in Jalan Petaling.