



THE NASI KANDAR LAW

Nasi Kandar is among the main delicacies consumed daily by Malaysians especially in the Northern part of Malaysia. The roots of nasi kandar can be traced back in 18th century as it was popularized by the southern Indian immigrants in Penang whereby they grabbed the opportunity to sell on-the-go and cheap meals for workers in the streets of Penang. They would carry around “kandar” which was a pole on the shoulder with the dishes on both ends. Fast forward to 21st century, Nasi Kandar is now served sometimes in air-conditioned restaurants and always in comfortable surroundings. Nonetheless, there are also some operators that are still maintaining the traditional ways of selling by the roadside in the open air. An issue that often bothers Nasi Kandar operators is the cleanliness of the restaurant and famously-claimed unhygienic migrant workers that help to operate the restaurant.

This issue often makes the headline of newspapers today. Most of the times, those restaurants were compounded by the city council or district health officers for having unclean kitchen sections or improper storage of the food ingredients. The laws that mainly used to compound the restaurant can be considered as too lenient as it was made within the jurisdiction of city council which has limited power. For instance, Section 39 of Municipal Council of Penang Island (Food Establishment) By-Laws 1991 only provides compound not exceeding RM 2000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding one year or both, if breaching any of the regulations enacted.

Although the regulations seem to be lenient, the by-laws have covered a number of issues and concerns in food handling and food management. Problems commonly take place because most of the restaurant operators feel that they can afford to pay for the compound due to the good business of selling Nasi Kandar. There exists Food Cleanliness Rules 2009 that was enacted pursuant to Section 34 of Food Act 1983 that provides clear rules and procedures of food handling from the arrival of raw material until the consumption of the food as well as the conditions of the restaurant and its employees.

We are able to deduce that there are already sufficient laws regarding quality and handling of foods in Malaysia. Perhaps the reason why there are still numerous of cases of Nasi Kandar restaurants being compounded or authority's order to close the business temporarily because of the lack of awareness and the element of ignorance among the Nasi Kandar operators. We can also see there will be occasional news regarding Nasi Kandar restaurants being compounded or order to close temporarily. It is impossible to say that they were not attentive on laws as there has been various cases depicted in the media involving Nasi Kandar restaurants, nonetheless, some of them choose to ignore it as they were busy with crowded customers and hence, ignoring the standard operating procedure ("SOP").

Perhaps, an ideal way to reduce these problems is by having our own piece of special legislation of Nasi Kandar Law. This Act or Enactment may lay out the guidelines provided by the Food Act 1983 but with a special addition of strict hygiene SOP and specific penalties or remedies for each wrongdoing instead of general punishment defined the Act before. The new law also can be an apprentice for new methods of educating the operators and customers of Nasi Kandar by adhering to strict SOP in keeping the place always clean and hygienic.

By doing so, not only we are on the path of curbing this issue but also to promote a unique piece of legislation to the world together with our famous Nasi Kandar. This law can further be studied or even promoted to cover other types of food outlet if proven effective in curbing the problems encountered by the food operators. Imagine what a Nasi Kandar Law can contribute if it becomes a reality in Malaysia, a first progressive step towards a better food industries and also definitely a more enjoyable time while eating our favorite Nasi Kandar!

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