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WORLD CUP SEASON

# SMOKING BAN LARGELY IGNORED

Checks by NST found most individuals openly smoking or vaping in eateries

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**T**HE smoking ban in all eateries, including restaurants and hawker stalls, seems to have been ignored during the ongoing football World Cup season.

Many were seen to have flouted the law under the Control of Tobacco Products (Amendment) Regulations 2018, in which all food and beverage premises had been declared as non-smoking areas.

According to Regulation 11 of the Control of Tobacco Product Regulations 2004, violators who are found guilty face fines of up to RM10,000 or imprisonment penalties of up to two years.

If restaurant owners permit smoking in their premises, they risk an RM5,000 fine or up to a year in jail.

Checks by the *New Straits Times* (NST) the last two days in Telok Panglima Garang, Shah Alam, and Kajang found that most individuals openly ignored the no-smoking signage in the premises by smoking, vaping and using the shisha.

Haitham Rumijam, 24, a graduate, said smokers were flouting the ban that had already been enforced for more than three years.

"I believe smokers are aware of the enforcement of this law, but they seemed to ignore it. There was no enforcement.

"Even the restaurant owners don't bother with the rule."

An undergraduate student from Selangor International Islamic University, who declined to be named, also said at least one local mamak restaurant owner turned a blind eye to the ban.

"Ever since the football World Cup started, I have been frequenting the local mamak eatery every day to watch the matches, and I saw that they (owners) turned a blind eye to customers who smoked in their premises.



Haitham Rumijam



A man smoking inside an eatery in Kuala Lumpur while watching a World Cup match on television. PIX BY AZHAR RAMLI

"As a non-smoker, I asked those smokers to smoke outside because I don't feel comfortable. They nonchalantly lit up their cigarettes and vaped inside the restaurant while watching the match," he told the NST.

An owner of AR Ainul restaurant in Rimbayu, who wanted to be known as Syed, however, said he complied with the rule by telling his customers to smoke outside the premises.

Nevertheless, they could not do much about patrons who chose to violate the ban.

"I do tell the customers who were seated near children to put out their cigarettes.

"I also prepare some space for smoking outside the restaurant for customers to utilise during football matches, especially in this World Cup season.

"I also encountered stubborn customers who refused to abide by the rule. They often lit up their cigarettes when it was raining."

He expressed dismay towards

those who brazenly ignored the ban and said enforcement teams from the Health Ministry appeared to understand his predicament.

"If they did not want to listen to me, I will let them face the authorities because in the end, they were the ones who had to fork out money for the fine.

"Previous customers had been charged for smoking in my premises twice this year by the Health Ministry. But when I asked the officer, they would not charge the owner," he added.

Meanwhile, a smoker and an electronic cigarette user, Ahmad Firdaus, 23, said he knew this law was already implemented in 2019, yet he did not see any enforcement.

"I used to be afraid of smoking and vaping inside restaurants because neither the majority of the eateries I visited nor the authorities enforced the ban. So I smoked.

"However, I would adhere to the ban if they return to carry out spot checks in eateries in the future."

The NST has contacted the Health Ministry's inspectorate and legal sector to comment on the matter.



Youth are also seen ignoring the no-smoking rule at an eatery in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. All food and beverage premises has been declared as non-smoking areas.