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hopes to get his licence back.**

WEE TECK HIAN

\$9,000 fine for rojak stallholder

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SINGAPORE — More than a year after one of the worst incidents of food poisoning here in recent years, the man whose Indian rojak was the cause of it all was fined \$9,000, the maximum sentence he could have gotten as a first-time offender.

Sheikh Allaudin Mohideen yesterday pleaded guilty in court to three charges. The 70-year-old admitted that he failed to ensure the refrigerator tray and chopping board at his stall were kept clean on April 4 last year. He also admitted to selling Indian rojak which was not fit for human consumption that day.

More than 150 people suffered food poisoning after eating the rojak from his stall at the former Geylang Serai temporary food centre. A third of them had to be hospitalised, and two later died from blood poisoning and multi-organ failure.

Accompanied by one of his sons, Sheikh Allaudin looked composed as the charges were read out to him in Tamil. National Environment Agency senior prosecutor Abdullah Ghani called on the court to impose the maximum fine, to serve as a reminder to all food handlers of the importance of good

food-handling practices.

In mitigation, Sheikh Allaudin told the court he was "in great financial difficulty", saying he had been unable to operate his stall for more than a year.

He told the judge that since the incident, he had not been able to find a job; he also asked for a lower fine.

Speaking to reporters after he paid the fine, Sheikh Allaudin said he was not happy as he felt that since he was a first-time offender, he should have been given a second chance. He also hoped to get his licence back.

"If they don't give me my licence, where am I going to work? I have to work," he said.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Allaudin's wife, Madam Hajara Aludeen, is running a new rojak and mee siam stall at Geylang Serai after successfully tendering for it.

According to media reports, her two sons are helping to run it after their suspension was lifted. They had passed a basic food hygiene course, a requirement by the National Environment Agency, but Sheikh Allaudin is not allowed to work at the stall.

The agency said it would keep a close watch on the cleanliness and hygiene conditions at the stall over the next few months.