

He pawns valuables to pay \$9,000 fine

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SHEIK Allaudin Mohideen, 70, the former rojak king, was in court yesterday with a thick wad of notes in his breast pocket.

He was facing a maximum fine of \$9,000 – a big sum for a “small-time businessman who has not worked in a year”, he told The New Paper.

The proprietor of the defunct Indian rojak stall, Rojak Geylang Serai, pleaded for leniency by saying he faced “high financial difficulties”.

After he was given the maximum possible penalty, the man in the centre of Singapore’s worst case of food poisoning walked out of court with a wide smile.

His relief and his desire to put everything behind him, was obvious.

“The matter is over,” he said in Malay in his home yesterday afternoon.

Earlier in court, Sheik Allaudin pleaded guilty to the three charges the National Environment Agency (NEA) had brought against him.

He did not have a lawyer but his two sons showed up to support him.

For selling food unfit for human consumption, he faced the maximum fine of \$5,000 as a first offender. Repeat offenders are liable to a fine up to \$10,000 and three months’ jail.

He also faced two counts of failing to keep his chopping board clean and failing to keep his refrigerator tray clean. Each offence carried a maximum fine of \$2,000.

NEA’s prosecuting officer Abdullah Ghani argued for the maximum fines to be imposed on Sheikh Allaudin as a deterrent.

He said investigations by the Ministry of Health and NEA showed that the stall, particularly the cooking area, was dirty and infested with cockroaches.

Sheikh Allaudin “paid no attention to the cleanliness of his licensed premises and had not observed good food-handling and proper personal hygiene practices in operating the licensed premises”, the investigators found.

The stall was shut down the morning after the outbreak 13 months ago.

Sheikh Allaudin told the court he could not operate a stall or find another job and this caused money issues.

His family resumed the business only last Thursday at a new stall in Geylang Serai market. The stall, called Rojak & Mee Siam, was tendered for by his wife, Madam Hajara Aludeen.

The couple’s sons, Mr Allayuthen, 33, and Mr Yasin, 31, are running it. They were allowed to become food handlers after passing a basic food hygiene course and becoming registered.

But Sheikh Allaudin is not allowed to work there. His wife can be fined up to \$2,000 if she is caught engaging him as a helper.

Starting over?

Right now, what he wants is a new NEA licence so he can start over.

“I don’t know any other job other than to sell food, but if not, I will see what other jobs I can do,” he said.

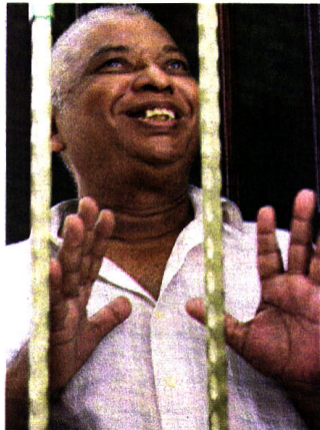
It is not clear if he will get his wish.

When contacted, an NEA spokesman said: “In light of the conviction, NEA will take into account the severity of the incident when we mete out the appropriate administrative penalties.”

But if it happens, what is the former rojak king thinking of selling, and where?

“Just let me get the licence first, and then we’ll talk,” he said.

– Additional reporting by Arul John



MAXIMUM PENALTY: Former rojak seller Sheik Allaudin Mohideen said he is now in financial difficulties after paying the fine yesterday.

TNP PICTURE:
GARY GOH