

TODAY'S ZAMAN

Nargile cafes to be closed under new law

Parliamentary Health Commission Chairman Cevdet Erdöl, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) deputy who contributed to the “smoke-free air zone” law, has proposed a bill to Parliament demanding that nargile cafes should be closed.

If the proposal is successful, water pipes, or nargile as they are popularly known in Turkey, will be treated as tobacco products and therefore banned from indoor spaces. According to Erdöl's proposal, companies which produce flavored tobacco for nargile will not be permitted to offer free samples of their product to nargile cafes. Businesses will also be banned from using the logos and trademarks of tobacco companies in their trading name.

Erdöl emphasised that cafes which primarily cater to nargile smokers will be closed permanently. Other businesses which offer customers the option to smoke nargile outdoors will be required to remove any references to nargile in their marketing. Businesses that break the proposed law will face a fine of between TL 50,000 and TL 250,000.

The proposal also suggests that anti-smoking warnings should be included on nargile bowls, as is currently the case for other tobacco products. On-the-spot fines of up to TL 5,000 would be issued to businesses that do not clearly display the warnings, which the proposal suggests should cover up to 65 percent of the surface of nargile bowls.

Speaking to Milliyet daily last week, Erdöl announced that he prepared the proposal in conjunction with Health Ministry officials. He said: “41 percent of nargile smokers are between the ages of 18 to 21 and 90 percent of these people prefer to smoke flavored nargile. Half of the regular customers of nargile cafes are university students, 18 percent are high school students and 16 percent are university graduates. Many people think that nargile is less harmful to the human body than cigarettes, including 62 percent of cigarette smokers. In fact, one session smoking a nargile causes an equal amount of damage to the body as almost three packs of cigarettes. That is why I submitted this proposal.”

Speaking to Sunday's Zaman, Levent İřanlar, owner of the Aynı Ali Teahouse from Manisa province, said his 140 year old business has served nargile ever since it opened. Aynı Ali is situated next to the Aynı Ali Mosque, where people enjoy music while smoking nargile and drinking a special tea made of mountain herbs.

İřanlar said that he is supporting the proposed law, which requires indoor nargile cafes to be closed down. "I fully support the ban. Businesses should only allow nargile smoking in an outdoor area, just like they do for cigarette smokers. The government should also announce how harmful smoking nargile is on television. In fact, there should be an age limit for nargile smokers. Under 18s should not be allowed to smoke nargile. Here, in our teahouse, we don't allow under 18s to smoke nargile," said the owner of the historic nargile cafe, adding that customers are not allowed to smoke nargile inside the premises.

However, there is a large portion of public who are against the law. Many of its opponents say nargile is part of Turkish culture and smoking it should not be prohibited in restaurants and cafes.

Istanbul's Tophane district is a popular place for smoking nargile, with dozens of cafes relying on water pipes for the success of their business. Nargilem Cafe is one of the most famous nargile cafes in Tophane and it is one of the spots that many tourists visit during their stay in Istanbul. The owner of Nargilem Cafe, Burak Oral, told Sunday's Zaman that nargile is a part of Ottoman culture and smoking it should not be subjected to a ban.

"People gather in nargile cafes to sit, talk and read books while smoking. Also, these places do not serve alcohol. Tourists visit nargile cafes, take photographs and enjoy their time while smoking nargile. We offer our customers the option of smoking outdoors and I believe businesses should be allowed to make their own decisions on this issue," said Oral.

University graduate Mehmet GÜngördü, who expressed his views to Sunday's Zaman at a nargile cafe in Istanbul's Fatih district, stated that it is not a good idea to close down businesses without any warning, although he agrees that nargile should not be smoked indoors.

Şerif Pak, who moved to Istanbul from Kahramanmaraş to study at university, said that he also agreed nargile smoking should be allowed in outdoor areas of cafes, adding that businesses which rely solely on serving nargile should not be closed. He believes the government should help these businesses to build an outdoor section in order to protect their livelihoods."

A graphic designer, Ömer Açıkalın, stated that nargile cafes offer an alternative place to meet for the conservative youth of Turkey, who do not go to clubs or bars that serve alcohol. Açıkalın added that he supported the proposed law but is worried that the government may completely prohibit nargile smoking in cafes in the future. *Istanbul Sunday's Zaman*

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Muhabir: MEHMET SOLMAZ
