



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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PRESS CONFERENCE

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TRAFFIC OBSTRUCTION AT LITTLE INDIA

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the City Council of Penang Island (MBPP) to take action on canopies that obstruct the roads (particularly China Street, Penang Street, King Street and Market Street) in Little India.

During a recent survey, CAP found that the pitching of canopies concentrated along sections of China Street, Penang Street, King Street and Market Street.

CAP wonders how the canopies can be permitted because the size of the canopies are so huge that they barely leave enough space for an adult pedestrian to squeeze past each side of a passing car or van.

Section 46 (4) of the Street Drainage and Building Act 1974 allows "temporary obstructions on occasions of festivals, etc." on the roads, it specifically stated that "nothing herein shall prevent the local authority from allowing any temporary erections in any public place or the temporary use of any part of a public places on occasions of festivals and ceremonies".

However, the MBPP should consider the fact that the canopies are erected by the shops that already have the goods within their premises. It does not make sense why these businesses have to extend their display out into the street.

By pitching the canopies, MBPP is allowing the importance of businesses to usurp the rights of pedestrians and traffic using the roads in the area. The roads in Little India are narrow and with the canopies the roads are causing constricting traffic flow thereby increasing the risks of accidents and snatch thefts, and impede access of ambulances or fire engines in case of any emergencies.

One such example was when two adjoining pre-war shophouses at King Street were razed in August 2015 blaze. Fortunately it did not take place in October that year during Deepavali, otherwise it would have become a more complicated situation for the Fire and Rescue Services Department. Despite that, it was reported that it took 71 firemen more than an hour to extinguish the fire.

Given the age of the buildings around Little India, they are actually a fire hazard and if there is an event of fire, it is incomprehensible how fire engines can have access to the fire site or fire hydrant. Although Section 46 (4) of the Street Drainage and Building Act 1974 allows temporary erection in public places, the responsibility lies squarely on the local authority to use good sense to permit or forbid.

Another concern is that pedestrians, in many cases, are forced to walk on the street because some sections of the five-foot ways are obstructed either by displays, furniture (tables and chairs in the case of food outlets), or permanent grilles.

In fact, owners of such properties should be prosecuted under Section 46 (1) of the same Act that forbids obstruction of any public place, inclusive 'footpaths and verandah-ways at the sides of streets' without written permission of the local authority.

Although a section of Penang Street and Market Street had been turned into a pedestrian mall during weekends, CAP feels that the businesses in the area should not be allowed to pitch canopies because of they will deprive cars of parking spaces and congest the area which has numerous other businesses and offices. We also have to consider the problems faced by transport vehicles that have to load or unload goods.

Such canopies and obstruction of five-foot ways pose as a death trap in the event of a fire or medical emergency whereby fire engines or ambulances will find great difficulty in getting through.

CAP calls for an immediate dismantling of these canopies for the above reasons and would suggest that these shops can conduct festive sales at the nearby Esplanade.

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