

Floating Chariot Festival: Use Environment-friendly Alternatives Instead of Plastic

The Penang State Exco for Housing and Environment, the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), The Penang State Green Council (PGC), The Malaysia Hindu Sangam Penang State Council (MHSPSC) and the management of the Sri Singamuga Kaliamman Temple in Teluk Bahang, urge Hindu devotees not to use any kind of synthetic foam material or plastic during the celebration of Masi Maga Theppa Thiruvizha, a floating chariot festival, which is celebrated on 2 March 2026 at Teluk Bahang, Penang.

The annual Floating Chariot Procession, celebrated at the 120-year-old Singamuga Kaliamman Temple in Teluk Bahang, is a seaside festival which attracts thousands of devotees. A floating chariot, decorated with lights and flowers carrying temple deities, will be taken on a tour of the sea during this festival.

Traditionally, thousands of devotees set decorated lantern-like lights to float in the sea after making a wish during the chariot tour. These decorated lights are usually fixed on styrofoam and polystyrene materials because of their light weight and ability to float. Also, these travel easily on water.

In the past, hundreds of synthetic foam-based materials have been seen floating on the sea the day after the procession. Foam and plastic materials are major sea polluters which threaten the marine ecosystem. This is because styrofoam and polystyrene are non-biodegradable and cannot break down into smaller pieces. These are ingested mistakenly as food by marine life such as fish and turtles, harming or killing them.

To prevent marine pollution and adverse effects on marine life, the Penang State government, CAP, PGC, MHS and the temple management appeal to devotees to abstain from using styrofoam or any type of polystyrene or plastic-based material for the lanterns.

Natural oil lamps on banana stem were used about two to three decades ago. These lights were fixed on layers of banana tree stems, which is the better choice because it not only floats well but also gets biodegraded in the sea.

The temple management has been promoting environmentally friendly alternatives in the past years and this year again, the temple is arranging for eco-friendly alternatives.

Therefore CAP, together with the State government for housing and environment, PGC, MHS and the temple management, urge devotees to go for safer and environment-friendly alternatives such as plates made of betel nut tree leaves, paddy husks and banana tree stems to float the lights.

As the festival is to thank God, Mother Nature and the sea for the livelihood it provides, it is only appropriate that environment-friendly approaches are taken to make the festival more meaningful.

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