

MMA advises devotees to perform their vows earlier

NATION 

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GEORGE TOWN: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has advised devotees to perform their vows earlier for the upcoming Thaipusam festival to avoid crowds in view of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak.

Its president Dr N. Ganabaskaran said it would be an arduous task for emergency teams to mobilise rescue efforts if children or the elderly come down with any symptoms of the coronavirus in huge crowds. "Hindus should make an exception this year in view of the virus and should not converge in large crowds during Thaipusam day, which falls on Feb 8.

"They should opt to perform their vows or penance much earlier.

"The public must make an effort to take utmost precaution during the festival, including giving priority to personal hygiene and ensuring that their children's health is taken care of," he said.

Respected religious expert, Swami Brahmananda Saraswati of the Dhyana Ashram of Self Knowledge in Kulim, said one should not take an orthodox view of performing vows only on Thaipusam day as it could be done earlier.

"While many devotees will want to perform their vows during Thaipusam due to the 'pusam natchathiram' (pusam star) which falls on Feb 8, vows could be performed from Feb 5.

"It's 'valarpirai' (waxing moon or moon in ascension) days before Thaipusam, which augurs well for performing penance or vows as it would help devotees avoid large crowds on the festival day," said Swami Brahmananda.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) is also in support of the advice in asking devotees to perform their vows earlier.

Its education officer N.V. Subbarow said devotees should prioritise their well-being and adapt to the present scenario.

He also said CAP was disappointed that many of the "thaneer panthals" (refreshment stalls) were still using non-degradable foam boxes to serve food to devotees.

“We have advised them against using such foams for years but it has fallen on deaf ears.

“Hopefully, the degradable ones are used this year,” he added.

Meanwhile, the Penang Hindu Endowment Board (PHEB), which organises the Thaipusam festival, said it would be extra vigilant during the festival this year in light of the coronavirus outbreak.

PHEB chairman Dr P. Ramasamy, who is also Deputy Chief Minister II, said the Thaipusam festival was well-managed, adding that ambulances and medical teams would always be on standby for any eventualities.

“There is no compulsion on our part for devotees to perform their vows earlier, but we are well-prepared in view of the present situation,” he said.

Thousands are expected to converge on the main temple of Batu Caves in Kuala Lumpur, as well as at the Waterfall Hilltop Murugan Temple in Penang.

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