

Devotees vow to break thousands of coconuts despite advice

GEORGE TOWN: That yearly din of at least 100,000 coconuts cracking open as masses of devotees hurl them onto the road before the Thaipusam chariot arrives looks all set to happen again next Wednesday.

Despite calls from NGOs not to overdo it, devotees like housewife D. Paramespery, 60, have readied large numbers to be smashed to express their gratitude to divine powers for answering their prayers.

Paramespery took a vow to have 1,500 coconuts smashed after her youngest son finished college and a medical check confirmed that lumps in her breast were not cancerous.

She disagreed with NGOs calling on devotees to smash just one coconut each to prevent wastage.

"It's up to individuals. For five years, I ordered 101 coconuts for Thaipusam but I vowed to order 1,000 for myself and 500 for my son this time. I must fulfil it.

In keeping with tradition, Paramespery said her husband, sons and passers-by would help her to smash the coconuts.

Anba Coconut Trading owner P. Sarasvathy said most of her customers who buy by the thousands for Thaipusam are Chinese devotees.

"It's their wish to buy as many as they want. We can't control that."

Pawnshop owner David Lee who operates in Datuk Keramat Road said he ordered about 1,000 coconuts every year and will invite everyone present outside his shop to smash the coconuts with him.

"We'll start smashing when we see the chariot. We just want to keep to our tradition," he said.

Ivory Properties Group Bhd ordered 2,000 coconuts.

Its corporate communication manager Winnie Yeoh said the company employees will smash the coconuts at the Ivory Cares Thaner Panthal (refreshment stall) on Datuk Keramat Road.

She said Ivory Properties had run the stall since 2007 and this year they will provide vegetarian lunches for 2,500 devotees.

In Petaling Jaya, the message is getting louder for Thaipusam devotees. Just smash one coconut, please!

"For me, one coconut is enough to show love and offering to God," Sri Maha Mariamman Temple in Shah Alam assistant secretary K. Murugan said.

His remarks came in the light of the One Coconut (*oru thenggai*) campaign by the Consumer Association of Penang to remind devotees that smashing just one coconut symbolises the surrender of one's ego at the feet of the deity Lord Muruga on Thaipusam.

"It is up to the devotees. Some will break about 100 but we keep it to one coconut as an offering and we believe that is enough," said Murugan yesterday.

An official from the Sri Subramaniya Swami Temple in Kajang, who did not want to be named, also called for moderation in the use of coconuts during the festival on Feb 9.

"We have never advocated people to buy hundreds of coconuts. This is unnecessary," the official said, adding that breaking one coconut is sufficient.