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The Star Says Wednesday, 28 December 2016

Saying 'no' to plastic bags is in the bag



BEGINNING next month, consumers in Selangor should treat every day as Saturday. That is probably the quickest way to adapt to the state government's move to ask all retailers to go plastic-free from 2017.

Because Saturday has been "No Plastic Bag Day" in Selangor since 2010, most of the people in the state are already used to the idea that shopping on that day of the week is different in the sense that they are expected to do a bit more to take care of Mother Earth.

They have to bring along reusable bags to carry the goods they buy (with some exceptions, such as raw food and poisonous substances), or pay 20 sen for a single-use plastic bag.

The Selangor government has decided that this will be the case seven days a week from Jan 1. And this green initiative does not just cover plastic bags; retailers will no longer provide polystyrene containers to pack food.

According to the state government, local council by-laws have been revised to support this policy and retailers must agree to go plastic-free when applying for or renewing licences.

Made from petrochemicals, the plastic bags and polystyrene containers take a long time to break down and are often swallowed by marine animals by mistake.

One of the state government's plastic-free campaign posters does a pretty good job of grabbing our attention, asserting that it takes up to 1,000 years for one plastic bag to decay into the earth and that polystyrene does not biodegrade at all.

The state government has apparently done a survey on how people feel about the use of plastic. It says over 90% of Selangor residents polled are aware that plastic bags are harmful to the environment, while 71% reckon that going without plastic once a week is just not good enough.

Selangor is not the only state to discourage the use of plastic bags and polystyrene containers.

Penang has had a plastic-free policy for retailers for several years. In Malacca, there has been a ban on petroleum-based plastic bags and polystyrene containers since the start of the year.

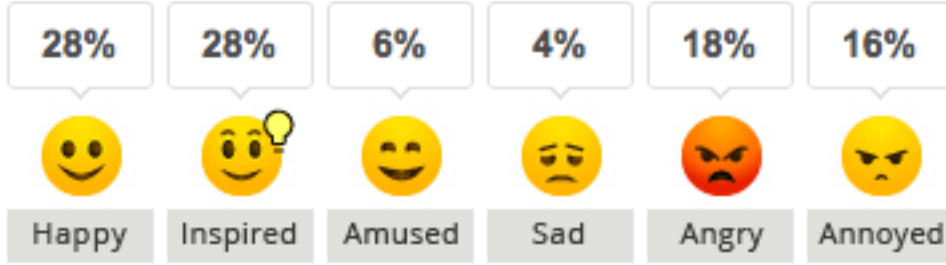
And there are similar measures, albeit at different stages, in Perak, Johor and the Federal Territories.

Of course, some retailers and hawkers view the plastic-free policy as troublesome and costly, but they need to see the big picture. The idea here is to persuade us all to rethink how we use the planet's resources and to change our behaviour so that we support sustainable development.

If enough consumers believe in a way of life that does less harm to our environment, it will make sense for the businessmen to respond accordingly.

It may be hard to imagine us shopping without plastic bags and taking away food in something other than polystyrene boxes, but it is harder to imagine life in a world that is slowly dying because we refuse to change.

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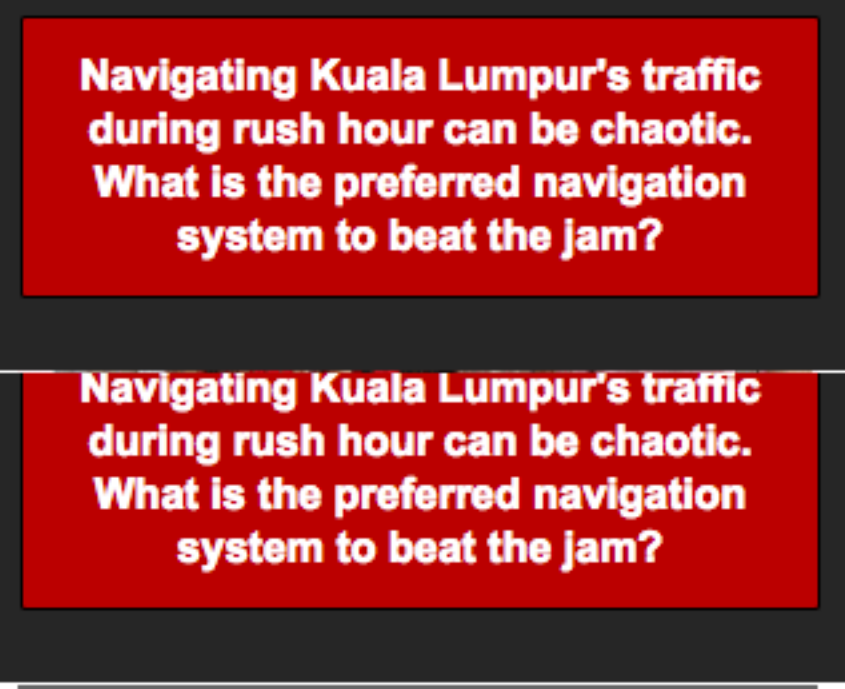


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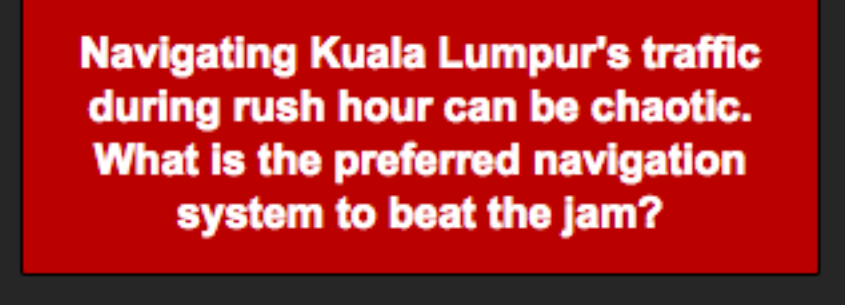


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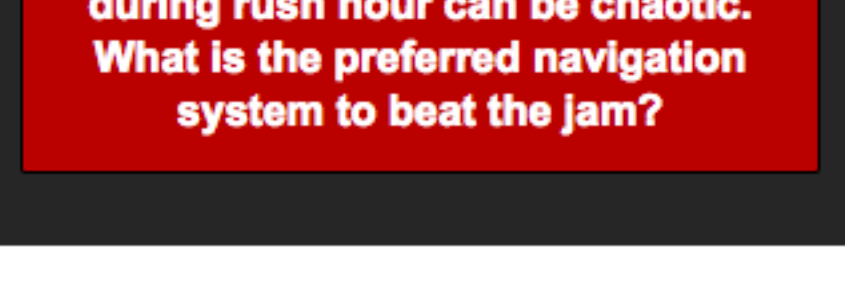
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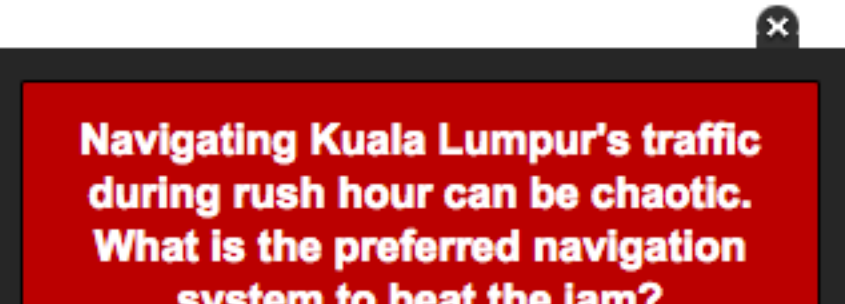
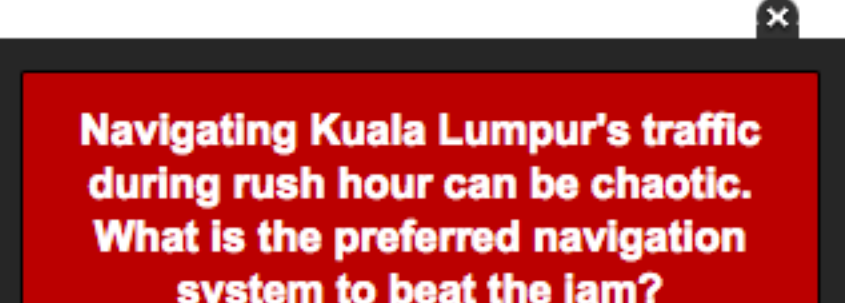
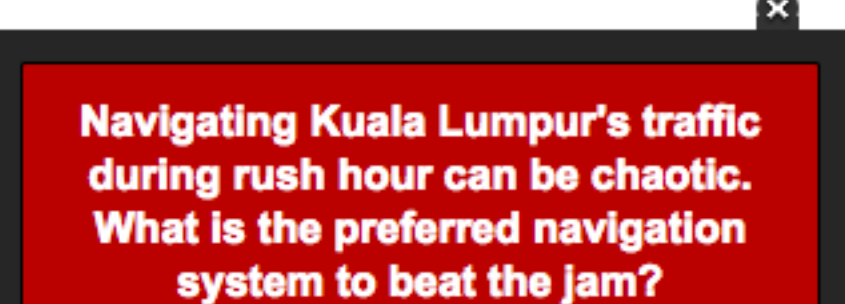
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