

Consider animal welfare law

NEWs that the existing Animal Act 1953 will be amended to provide for stiffer penalties against those found to be involved in animal abuse and cruelty against animals will undoubtedly be well received.

However, promises of an amendment to the Act have been spoken about by the relevant authority since the 1980s and despite years of appeal from animal welfare groups and NGOs the Act has yet to be amended.

Meanwhile, incidences of animal cruelty continue to be reported without any response as to when exactly the Animal Act will be amended.

It was revealed in the media last year that the proposed amendment to the Act would seek to raise the fine for animal cruelty from a paltry sum of RM200 or imprisonment for a term of six months or both to RM50,000 and a jail term of not more than one year.

In my view, any proposed amendments to the Act should also aim, besides heavier punishments, to institute changes in the way ani-



mal welfare needs to be handled in Malaysia.

To my knowledge, Malaysia does not have an Animal Welfare Act but only prevention of animal cruelty legislation.

This means that nothing can be done about the way animals are treated if it has not been subjected to an overt act of cruelty. The

authorities must wait for the animal's condition to deteriorate to the stage of prosecutable cruelty before they can act.

The proposed amendments to the Animal Act 1953 must be comprehensive enough to provide for animal welfare as a whole.

The proposed Bill should take into account the views of animal

welfare groups, veterinarians and others who have invaluable input in this regard.

Animal pets have to be better treated and not as commodities that can be acquired and thrown away on a whim.

Pet shops must be better regulated and animals must not be crammed in cages as there are shops that only provide space for an animal to stand in and turn around.

Having pets is a huge responsibility and pet owners should always be reminded of their responsibilities to reduce incidences of dumping and abuse of pets.

Humane methods must be applied by all local authorities when handling strays. So far our records of handling strays fall short of expectations in terms of putting a stop to animal cruelty.

Animal lovers have stood by and watched helplessly as animal abuse cases are committed daily by local municipal employees – except for a few local authorities – handling stray dogs with brute force, pet owners neglecting or abandoning their pets, zoo animals living

in deplorable conditions and with strays brutally treated, maimed or killed by cruel individuals.

It is time for the Government to put an end to this kind of inhumane acts against animals and help improve Malaysia's standing worldwide in the area of animal welfare.

Now is the right time to replace the obsolete Animals Act 1953 with amendments that will accord greater protection to animal welfare and put a stop to all forms of animal cruelty.

There should be no further delay in tabling the amendments to the Animal Act 1953 in the current sitting of Parliament.

As a pet lover, I look forward to the day when we, in Malaysia, can introduce our own animal cops like in the United States, to go after those who commit animal cruelty and abuse.

Ensuring animal welfare should also be part of our transformation programme.

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