

Duo admit neglecting cats

Boarding centre owners plead guilty to animal cruelty charges

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TWO owners of a cat boarding centre pleaded guilty yesterday to 30 charges of neglecting the welfare of animals under their care last September.

Petknode Cat Boarding's Shahrul Azuan Adanan and Yushairy Khairuddin, both 29, told a magistrate's court that they were shorthanded between Sept 3 and 5 and encountered transportation problems. This led to the neglect of the animals boarded at their centre in Damansara Damai during Hari Raya.

The court fixed June 28 for sentencing.

During mitigation, defence counsel Syariful Nizam Shahrudin told magistrate Elena Hong Tze Lan that under the Animal Act, if the abuse was not physical, the accused could be fined. He said his clients were first-time offenders.

"They are truly sorry and regret having neglected their duty to care for the welfare of the animals. However, it was not done on purpose. Their actions were neglect and not direct physical abuse causing hurt," he said.

He said none of the cats under Petknode's care died.

"Not even one cat was dead when the owners came to pick their cats up. Many died a few days after being collected. Thus their deaths could have been caused by other factors and not by my clients," he said.



TRAUMATISED: Juriahwati Abdul Wahid, 39, explaining how her cat was made to live in unsanitary conditions and was returned to her with its white coat turned brown. An image of the accused is captured on her tablet — Pic: **ASHRAF SHAMSUL AZLAN**

The prosecution objected to the plea for a lighter sentence, saying that Shahrul Azuan and Yushairy were more interested in profit and their actions had tarnished the industry.

Prosecution officer Jamadi Badri said: "They had taken in more than 100 cats between Aug 26 and Sept 3, which they should not have done if they knew they were shorthanded.

"Their actions have tarnished the trade for others and also tarnished the image of the country as the news of this case went viral over the Internet via various websites.

"Punishment according to Section 44 (1) of either a fine of RM200 or a jail term of six months or both will send the message to the public not to take the neglect and abuse of animals

lightly."

Outside the courtroom, about 30 pet owners and members of NGOs expressed their dissatisfaction that they would not be able to testify as there would not be a trial. They hope the duo would receive the appropriate punishment.

Logistics executive Shazana Mahazir, 26, was upset that she would not be called as a witness and believes the court had not been given all the facts.

"I dropped off my cat at the boarding centre and they showed me the room where my cat will be kept. However, today in court, the accused said that the cats were only received at Petknode but taken to a bungalow in Desa Moccis, Sungai Buloh, where they were housed. This issue was not raised in court today."

Animal welfare groups also claim that a number of cats were found dead on Petknode's premises.

Stray Cats Rescue and Treatment Community Help volunteer Bazilah Bahrin said: "When some of us went to the Petknode office, we found a number of cats dead.

"We are unhappy with the prosecution officer from the Department of Veterinary Services who did not counter the defence's claims."

The news of abuse and neglect at Petknode broke out on Sept 4 as many pet owners returned from their Hari Raya break only to find their pets in unsanitary and appalling conditions. It was reported that more than 100 cats were at Petknode in unhealthy conditions, suffering from wounds and weight loss, while nine cats died.