

Start them young on animal welfare education

I SUPPORT the government's proposal to introduce a subject on animal welfare in schools by next year.

The proposal, made by Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek, will go a long way towards inculcating awareness among the younger generation to care for animals.

I hope the Education Ministry will be receptive to the proposed introduction of the subject. Both ministries are discussing the matter.

When we start to create awareness on animal welfare among children, they will grow up respecting animals and will be more conscious of their responsibilities towards animals, especially when they have pets.

Through education, we can create a positive and caring attitude towards animals with a sense of compassion and respect for the value of life.

Animal welfare education promotes knowledge, understanding, responsibility as well as the right attitudes and values towards animals. It can bring significant change in the way animals are treated.

The introduction of animal welfare subject in schools is in line with the Animal

Welfare Act 2015, which was gazetted last December. The landmark legislation seeks to better promote animal protection and prevent abuse.

I am hopeful the Act can be enforced as soon as early next year to give better protection to animals in the country. There are many public complaints, media reports and social media postings about animals being physically abused or pets abandoned by the owners without food and water.

We have to put a stop to all forms of ill-treatment against animals. We must not tolerate any cruelty against animals. It is totally unacceptable, unethical and uncivilised. Animals have a right to live free from pain and suffering, and especially death from a vicious killing.

Under the Act, a minimum fine of RM20,000 and a maximum penalty of RM100,000 fine and a three-year jail sentence will be imposed on those convicted of abusing animals. Cruelty offences specified under the law include the act of beating, mutilating, poisoning, confining in area that restrict natural movements of the animals, abandoning or the owner allowing such cruelty against the animal.

The Act also requires all individuals and businesses which carry out activities involving animals to obtain a licence. Under the licensing requirements, owners have to ensure animals are free from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

The Animal Welfare Board should also be formed soon to raise public awareness on animal welfare and prevent inhumane treatment of animals and pets. Besides providing public education, the board will also monitor the work of associations or bodies that handle animals to prevent trauma, pain or suffering to animals.

Local authorities must also be educated on animal welfare where those in charge of catching stray animals must not commit acts of cruelty against these sentient creatures.

Local authorities, in most cases, are unkind to strays. It seems that the standard operating procedures for the catching of strays have not been complied with by many local authorities, where the treatment of strays appears to be left to the whims and fancies of dog catchers.

What our local authorities should do is to come out with an effective and humane stray management plan with the support

of animal welfare non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on humane ways to catch, transport and manage strays.

In essence, teaching animal welfare education in schools is the long-term preventive strategy that would bring about a more lasting impact in attitude for Malaysians to be more responsible towards animals in general. This is because the subject will include understanding of animal needs and the root causes of animal cruelty and abuse.

The Education Ministry, in preparing the module for the animal welfare subject, should consult animal welfare NGOs that can provide valuable insights into effective animal welfare education, including responsible pet ownership.

I believe animal welfare education will contribute to the creation of better citizens and a caring society.

To grow as a nation, we have to be compassionate to all animals and treat them humanely as we share the planet with them.

TAN SRI LEE LAM THYE
 PATRON
 SPCA SELANGOR



The staff of a hotel present a mock cheque for the upkeep of strays to SPCA during a visit to the animal centre in Jelutong, George Town. The writer says the animal welfare education will help create better citizens and a caring society. — Picture by V. Sivaji