

The Malay Mail

27 July 2010

Local zoos scrutinised by new coalition

By Darshini Kandasamy

Kuala Lumpur - A newly-formed coalition is set on improving the welfare of animals languishing under sub-par conditions in 10 local zoos.

The coalition, called myZOO, was formed following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on July 6 among the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Selangor, SPCA Penang, SPCA Johor, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Sam), Green Wings and Malaysian Animal Welfare Society.

The 10 zoos were among 39 in Peninsular Malaysia surveyed by Singaporean organisation Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) in 2009.

MyZOO said the survey on the zoos showed that a majority failed to meet acceptable standards to ensure the wellbeing of its animals.

Between June 8 to 27, a second check on the 10 worst previously surveyed zoos revealed their status remained unchanged while several worsened.

Of the 10 zoos, two are located in Johor, two in Pahang, while there is one in Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Perak, Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan each.

During the survey which covered 159 enclosures, the living conditions of elephants, primates, big cats, bears and small mammals were assessed.

Also revealed was that 102 of the enclosures had poor drainage while it was also found that elephants, macaques and gibbons were tethered by their necks, waists and/or leg chains at four of the zoos.

"In view of this, myZOO was formed at the second Malaysia Zoo Animal Welfare Roundtable Discussion on July 5-6, witnessed by representatives of the Wildlife and Natural Parks Department (Perhilitan) and Senator Dr S. Ramakrishnan," said myZOO spokesperson Dr Kavita Kaur.

"There has been an increasing number of reports of cruelty to zoo animals and the public have also been voicing their concerns. "It is our responsibility to end this cruelty and take positive action."

She also said the formation of the coalition was timely as Parliament is set to debate the new Wildlife Conservation Bill, when passed, will replace the current Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

"Zoos are not the ideal place for wildlife but in the meantime, while animals are still housed in zoos, we need to ensure they are kept under the best conditions. We are forming a team of veterinarians who we hope will, with the cooperation of the zoos, check on the conditions of animals."

Kavita requested members of the public be the eyes and ears of myZOO and to alert the coalition should they come across any case of animal cruelty or badly-run zoos.

Acres, as well as the World Society for the Protection of Animals would serve as advisers to the coalition.

Meanwhile, concerning the upcoming Wildlife Conservation Bill, Perhilitan deputy director-general Mislihah Mohamad Basir told *The Malay Mail*: "At the moment, Perhilitan only deals with the issuing of licences for keeping wild animals so there is not much we can do about the condition of zoos."

Mislihah added that once the new law was passed, Perhilitan would work on drafting a comprehensive set of regulations for all zoos to allow them to improve the conditions of the zoos.