

Stories by SS YOGA, OLIVIA LEE, SHAUN HO, DESIREE TRESA GASPER and QISHIN TARIQ

# NGOs bellow in anger

## Animal rights activists rally for prompt action against cruelty

**PETALING JAYA:** Non-governmental organisations and animal rights activists have expressed outrage at the expose on zoos in the country and the treatment of the animals under their care.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) president S.M. Mohd Idris said action should be taken against errant zoo-keepers.

"Their owners and operators should be prosecuted and charged in accordance with the revised Act," he said.

He alleged that in 2009, there were reports of deaths of a few day-old tiger cubs in a zoo outside Johor Baru but the zoo was still allowed to keep and breed protected wildlife, though it had no legal permit, licence or documents.

"Until Perhilitan enforces the law and defends the rights of animals rather than protect zoo owners, nothing will change," Mohd Idris said.

Acres (a Singapore-based animal rights NGO) executive director and founder Louis Ng said some of the zoos could do with improvements and should be given a chance to

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do so.

He said Perhilitan should instruct zoos to focus on enhancing the welfare of their existing animals, instead of acquiring any new one.

"Zoos that consistently ignore the welfare of the animals should have their permits revoked," said Ng.

Acres has come out with surveys of all the 39 zoos in the peninsula previously and is working with Perhilitan and the Malaysian Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria on improving the state of the country's zoos.

Most of the NGOs are of the opinion that new zoos should not be allowed to operate and the approval of licences and permits for new zoos or animal establishments should be suspended.

SAM said Perhilitan should instead concentrate on alleviating the poor conditions of wildlife in captivity and ensure environmental enrich-



**Green, green nothing:** No plants, no grass, but only dirty water for the goats and deer at a zoo in Kedah.

ment for all captive animals.

MyZOO spokesperson Dr Kavita Kaur said the living conditions of the animals needed to be improved first.

She added that a clean environment, shelter from negative elements and the public, access to clean food and water and ensuring animals that need veterinary care were attended to by qualified veterinarians could be a start.

MyZOO is a coalition of NGOs comprising Green Wings, Malaysian Animal Welfare Society, SAM, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Johor, SPCA Penang, and SPCA Selangor that was formed last July to tackle zoo animal welfare issues.

All the NGOs agreed that the new Act should have specific regulations and guidelines on the operation of zoos.

## Ministry: New law for better zoo care by June

**PETALING JAYA:** The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry (NRE) says a dedicated regulation for the operation of circus, exhibitions and zoos is expected to be enacted by June.

This was in response to *The Star's* email to Perhilitan that contained 35 questions with regards to what its probe discovered. Perhilitan is under the purview of the NRE.

Most of the questions were, however, not addressed specifically.

The NRE did say that the regulation would be under the new Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 (Act 716) that came into effect on Dec 28. It has a six-month transition period.

The NRE said, under the previous Act, there was no provision that required zoo operators to obtain permission to operate zoological parks.

Hence, these could be operated by just obtaining approval from the local authorities.

Perhilitan acknowledged that the Guideline on Zoological Parks Management in Malaysia, set up in the 1990s, was administrative in nature and no legal action can be taken if the zoo operators did not adhere to the rules.

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