

Course on animal welfare

IT is unfortunate that many Malaysians are still unformed about animal welfare even in this era of digital technology where information travels faster than the speed of light, so to speak.

Year in and year out, we see many reports in the media of animals being abused physically and emotionally (yes, they have feelings too). Cats and dogs, stray or pets, are brutally beaten to death, scalded with hot water, chained to fences under the sun, thrown from the balconies of tall buildings, poisoned, or used for entertainment in shows and competitions.

A few years ago, there was the case of stray dogs that were transported to an island off Selangor and left to starve to death. This was the easy way of disposing “unwanted” animals. The perpetrators might not have had the heart to kill the dogs themselves but leaving them on an island where food was scarce is equivalent to making them suffer a slow and painful death. There was a huge public outcry over the mis-

treatment of these animals at that time.

Currently, the Animals Act 1953 (Act 647) revised 2006, amended 2013 (Act A1452) sets out the punishment for animal abusers under Part IV, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Section 44(1) a to g), which states that a person found guilty of animal abuse will be fined and may face possible imprisonment. However, the fines cannot make up for the emotional trauma suffered by these animals.

The Government has recently gazetted the Animal Welfare Act 2015 (Act 772) which elaborates on matters pertaining to animal use and handling (Section 24 to 35 of Part IV-VI). The penalty for animal abuse has also been significantly raised to a fine of between RM20,000 and RM100,000 and/or imprisonment for up to three years.

The Act will not only be used to punish the perpetrators but also to instil awareness of observing good animal welfare in our society.

In terms of awareness of animal

welfare, we are now at par or not too far behind developed countries like the United States, which led the way by introducing its Animal Welfare Act in 1966. Britain gazetted its Animal Welfare Act in 2006. In Australia, the Animal Welfare Act differs according to the states and territories with the earliest, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979, being gazetted in New South Wales and the latest, Animal Care and Protection Act, becoming law in 2001 in the state of Queensland.

In South-East Asia, the Philippines took the lead when it established its Animal Welfare Act in 1998. Thailand's National Legislative Assembly recently passed the 2014 Prevention of Animal Cruelty and Provision of Animal Welfare Act which prohibits cruel treatment of animals, especially pets and domestic animals. In Indonesia, Law 18 of 2009 of the country's criminal code focuses on animal welfare from the point of health and animal husbandry rather than prevention

of animal cruelty.

In tandem with the Animal Welfare Act 2015, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Universiti Putra Malaysia has incorporated the subject of animal welfare into its Doctor of Veterinary Medicine curriculum. This is part of its efforts to instil awareness of animal welfare among future veterinarians and veterinary personnel.

The subject incorporates the Five Freedoms in animal welfare, a concept developed in 1965 and formalised in 1979 by the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council.

It is hoped that in future, cases of animal abuse will drop drastically as the public as well as veterinary personnel will be well informed of issues pertaining to animal welfare and take necessary measures to prevent it from happening.

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