

**Where do animals figure in 1Malaysia?
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If the Animals Act 1953 is any indication of the concern shown by the 'powers that be' in providing justice to abused animals, this act offers nothing but disappointment.

Under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Part IV) of the Animals Act 1953, justice in the true sense of the word is absent. It is a shame that this Act, which was an amendment of the Animal Ordinance 1953 (revised in 2006) lets animal abusers off the hook without the slightest remorse.

The Animals Act 1953 'kindly' provides a fine of RM200 or a six-month imprisonment to the perpetrator, giving the culprit the option of choosing between paying the fine and going to jail.

Is that how cheap animal life is regarded by our law? Giving the perpetrators the option of choosing to get off by paying a fine is the reason why some people keep abusing animals, be it their own pets or street animals like cats and dogs because the law has failed in its duty to create the necessary fear among such irresponsible pet owners or animal abusers.

In the year 2005, Sheena, a German shepherd dog was left to die by her irresponsible owner of seven years, Lien Chong San, after he shifted house.

The dog died a very painful death. And how did the law through the Animal Ordinance 1953 punish Sheena's cruel and irresponsible owner for causing her painful death? A miserable RM100 in default of two days' jail.

Lien was charged under Section 44 (1) (d) of the Animal Ordinance 1953 which carried a maximum fine of RM200 or a maximum six months jail or both.

It was said that since 1953, only two or three animal abusers were jailed and that too not exceeding two days. To appease animal lovers, the government passed the new Animal Act 2006 but not a single provision of the Animal Ordinance 1953 was changed.

Truly, for a country that prides in having the longest and tallest of buildings, it is a shame that Malaysia fails to strike a chord between what is the living and the inanimate.

With such an useless and discriminatory act in place, it is evident that animals rights is not an agenda of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, unlike in the case of his colleague, United States president Barack Obama, who adores animals.

When leaders fail to respect animal rights

In a country where the prime minister gives premium to the people for the sole reason that they will decide whether he stays in office come the next general election, it is little wonder that street animals like cats and dogs have yet to earn Najib's love, affection and respect.

We are always urged to aspire to lead by example, both in our personal and professional lives.

But what happens when the country's leader fails time and again to set an example as a human being who cares and respects animals, especially the less fortunate street cats and dogs?

Innumerable cases of cats being abused or dogs being inhumanely shot dead are reported. And what does Malaysia's 'able' leader do? He dismisses such incidents, perhaps because he finds them not worthy of any mention or attention.

More recently, an elderly woman was traumatised when her faithful companion, her licensed therapy dog, was shot dead by the Ipoh City Council officers on Oct 30.

There has to be a very valid reason for gunning down street animals. The council is in no position to give arbitrary power to its workers to shoot dogs in the streets. The shooting of the dog in Ipoh is not the first of its kind but I can only pray it is the last.

What is astounding is that these incidents have not moved a 'people person' like Najib the least bit.

Don't animals have any rights? Is that why Sheena's death five years ago was never viewed as a big deal by the country's 'powers that be'?

In case the country's administration prefers to forget, it is the canines that help sniff out drugs and keep traffickers at bay. It is also the sniffer dogs that we count on to save lives by locating victims buried under rubble of debris in cases where buildings collapse. And yet no respect is accorded to the canines and felines in this country of ours.

Many months ago it was reported in the newspapers that two dogs who were in a shophouse that was gutted down by fire refused to budge and loyally awaited the return of their owner. Miraculously, both dogs survived the fire. And to think that some trigger-happy council worker takes pleasure in hunting down God's unique creature.

It has been proven that pets, be they cats or dogs have a healing effects on people who rear them. Abroad, dogs are worshipped for they are very much needed by the disabled to make their way around while cats are often the darling companions of both the young and old.

Don't trample on animal rights

What good is the mantra 'people first performance now' when it is all a sham, the sole objective being to dupe the rakyat into parting with their votes in favour of the Barisan Nasional coalition?

It is bad enough that the 'third class' mentality is very much alive among Malaysians; evident not just in the way they treat one another but also in the manner in which animals are being abused.

So many cases of abuse concerning animals has been reported but not a single politician, be it from BN or opposition has shown any interest in championing animal rights.

I suppose with so much mud-slinging taking place when it comes to seizing power and with all eyes set on conquering Putrajaya, the administrative hub of the nation, who has time to pull over by the road and rescue a cat or dog in pain?

I take the country's administration to task because that is where everything is conceptualised. Is there no Cabinet minister who has love for animals?

Stop waxing lyrical about Malaysia being truly Asia when time and again the horror in which both the street animals and pets are abused has been revealed.

Stop animal abuse

Although the Ipoh City Council apologised over the recent shooting incident and announced that all shootings of dogs are henceforth banned in that state, that is no consolation for the 75-year-old woman who lost her loyal companion. Why was such an announcement made only after the dog was shot dead?

The Department of Veterinary Services director-general Abdul Aziz Jamaluddin's statement that all shooting of strays be stopped immediately is long overdue.

However, one cannot help but doubt the sincerity behind his statement – why did Abdul Aziz not imply such a ruling much earlier on? It clearly shows the move is not because the council or the Department of Veterinary Services is remorseful over what happened but perhaps because there was political pressure to do so.

When an incident like the one in Ipoh happens, decency calls that Najib, who claims to champion the rakyat's welfare, take the council to task. Unless Najib Razak learns to empathise with the anguish of the senior citizen whose dog was shot dead, his slogan of 'people first' is just that - a 'vote-for-Najib' gimmick.

What did the government through the department of veterinary services do when a concerned citizen wrote in to Malaysiakini in March about the horror of witnessing a dog being abused at the Kepong Central KTM station by the Kuala Lumpur City Hall workers who stripped of all semblance of humanity tied the dog to a grille and shoved a piece of wood down his throat?

The dog was bleeding and was surrounded by its faeces. The council workers however were the least bothered with the dog's suffering because they were busy sprucing up the area in preparation for a visit by a cabinet minister.

I am sure the minister concerned would have learned of this cruelty but did he bother reprimanding the workers? Is this what the spirit of Malaysia Boleh is truly about?

In 2005, Star reported an abuse case by a cat breeder. The breeder was charged in court for neglecting the cats he used for breeding by forcing them to lay inside small cages alongside their faeces, creating an unbearable stench.

Then there was an incident in Johor Bahru where five men armed with sticks attacked several street cats and dogs that were under the care of the Johor Bahru Humane Touch Animal Welfare Society in Taman Delima.

Then there was a case where the Kuala Langat District Council killed nine pedigree dogs without any veterinary assessment.

Did the above cases attract anyone's attention, be it the politicians, the cabinet ministers or Department of Veterinary Services?

Not a word was deemed necessary to take some form of action to protect these animals. But thankfully, these cases came to the attention of the 124-year-old The Mayhew Animal Home and Humane Education Centre in London which is very disappointed with Malaysia's lack of respect for its animals.

When the 'powers that be' show no respect for God's creation and decide to play God by abusing the helpless animals, it is time voters get their heads together and show such heartless 'leaders' the door.

In Sheena's case, the neighbour had telephoned the Department of Veterinary Services three times but the department did nothing to save the canine's life. This indifference by the department is nothing new and sadly it is at the expense of the lives of the abused animals.

Maybe the department is plain lucky that it escaped any legal action by animal lovers for failing to discharge its duty in Sheena's case, causing the canine to undergo such torture.

The Animal Act 1953 gives the veterinary authority and the police the power to arrest without warrant any person caught abusing an animal as stated under Section 44.

And a police officer may also stop in a street or public place and examine any animal if he has reason to believe an offence has been or is being committed under Section 44 i.e. the animal is being abused or tortured.

Is this however being done by the police and the veterinary authority?

If Sheena's death is anything to go by, then both the police and the veterinary authority are taking it easy, never mind that it is a case of life and death affecting the felines and canines.

With such rampant disrespect for animal rights, it is no surprise that the World Animal Day which is celebrated annually on October 4 goes unnoticed by the Department of Veterinary Services, the local councils and the 'powers that be' in Malaysia.

Malaysia a poor example

There is no excuse for the 'powers that be' in Malaysia to conveniently dismiss animal rights in the country. If countries like India, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) can go to great lengths to protect their animals, what is stopping Malaysia from doing so?

Is the excuse "a lack of budget" or is it simply a case of having no political will and a total disrespect for animal rights in Malaysia?

India is said to be leading in increasing number of convictions for animal abuse and that too with stiff penalties. One court in India stopped the bullock cart race held during the temple festivals because the cows are beaten with sticks to force them to move faster.

In the case of UAE, the laws not only protect domestic pets but also street animals. Abuse of an animal is punishable with a jail term of up to one year and a fine of not more than RM10,000 or both.

For Hong Kong, several years ago it passed The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Bill 2006 to institute stiffer penalties for animal cruelty.

The fine was raised from US\$641 to US\$25,641 and a jail term of three years was thrown in.

The Hong Kong government went so far as to set up a hotline to report abuse and citizens could call the police who are given the authority to arrest animal abusers.

While the move to uphold animals rights by India, Hong Kong and UAE is commendable, it is shameful that for a developed country like Malaysia, there is no such effort in sight to defend animal rights.

Basically, it all boils down to the commitment to protect animals and this is sorely lacking, with the hopeless Animals Act 1953 in place.

It is regrettable that Malaysia's leaders are nothing but a bunch of myopic politicians looking only to fill their respective pockets.

Their interest lies in building the tallest, longest and largest of things so that 'selling' the country to outsiders becomes easier.

Absolutely no concern has been put in wanting to save our street animals, putting Malaysia to shame when compared to animal-caring nations like India and Hong Kong.

Only when Malaysia's 'powers-that-be' understand the meaning of love, affection and respect for another living being, will they then realise the essence behind these wise words from Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States - "I am in favour of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being."

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