

Article published in NST, 1st April 2008

2008/04/01

Vet Dept clears horse ranch

[By : Julia Chan](#)

PAPAR: The Veterinary Services Department has cleared the Melinsung ranch of rumours that its horses were in urgent need of care.

Its director, Datuk Awang Sahak Salleh, said reports over the Internet on the matter were untrue.

"I have received more than 200 emails from all over the world about the matter. It is shocking. We have been monitoring the horses at the ranch on a weekly basis and are satisfied with the living conditions.

"As far as I am concerned, the problem has been solved. I even took an officer from the World Society for the Protection of Animals in Bangkok to observe conditions at the ranch."

Awang Sahak was commenting on online allegations that horses at the ranch were poorly looked after.

Ranch owner Col Datuk Abdul Ghani Rashid denied rumours that his horses had been confiscated and that he had been banned from rearing horses.

"I am reducing the numbers of horses at my ranch. It is a natural practice as I breed horses and cannot keep them all. I am selling 30 of them and will keep about 20 to 30," he said.

The ranch has been the subject of controversy after rumours surfaced that the department had ordered the confiscation of 30 horses and banned Abdul Ghani from rearing them for sale.

A letter is also believed to have been sent to Tourism Minister Datuk Azalina Othman on the matter.

Last year, the *New Straits Times* reported that tourists who had come to the ranch had reported maltreatment of 70 horses.

This led to an investigation by the department which then stated that the horses were in good condition.

Meanwhile, stable manager Anthony Lamak, who has been working with horses for over

a decade, said the rumours were ludicrous.

"We have to look after our horses. After all, it is our business to breed and sell them.

"Some of the pictures taken may have been of our old and ailing horses.

"Someone may have exploited them and distorted the scenario here."

The ranch sold 30 horses this year for between RM15,000 and RM25,000 each.

Letter From Dawn Peacock to NST, in response to the above article

Dear Julia Chan and NST,

I am writing to you on behalf of the World Society for the Protection of Animals, Asia Office in Bangkok after reading the article published 'Vet Dept. Clears Horse Ranch'.

I am astonished that this article can be published by the NST knowing your usual support for animal cruelty cases and to the SPCA Selangor in the past.

The campaign against animal cruelty in Malaysia has been well documented by the NST and the general public of Malaysia is becoming more vocal, more awareness is being raised by the credible media accounts as we usually see in the NST. However this piece is crude and false and at worst is publicizing an owner who has caused unnecessary suffering to over 70 horses, 21 of who have died in the past 6 months due to neglect, others being sold so that the owner can profit, is this justice?

Rumours are one thing, factual photographic evidence documented and collated by the SPCA and supplied in a timeline as sent by Ms Sue Quek are quite another and cannot be disputed.

As Datuk Awang Salleh mentioned, I did visit Melingsung Ranch with the DVS officers who have been supervising the Ranch for the last one month, afterwards I had a meeting with Datuk Awang Salleh and the Head Enforcement Officer Dr Amat, at this meeting I told them that had this cruelty been reported in KL I am confident that the DVS there would have confiscated immediately and pushed ahead for prosecution. **I told them that 80% of the horses I saw at the Ranch that day (2nd March 2008) were in poor condition most likely due to chronic malnutrition.**

Also, as the DVS Sabah have been happy to applaud themselves in this case I would like to state here that the lack of welfare training these Officers (some of whom are Veterinarians) have is paltry considering they are responsible for enforcing the Laws regarding animal cruelty, even so, the SPCA and myself found that they are confused over the Laws that are applicable within Sabah and who indeed should be enforcing and prosecuting the Laws. Any persons who could look at these horses and state 'good condition' at any point in the last 6 months must be inept, please see Vet Report from Dr Bala Dr. Balakrishna Polanaidoo SMZ, AMT. [B.V.Sc.](#) & A.H., Cert

V. Ophthal & Eq. Surg. (Syd) Veterinary Surgeon on the matter on 28th February 2008 ***‘It is in my opinion that these horses need desperate care and treatment as soon as possible.’***

The WSPA and the SPCA Selangor have repeatedly made offers to help to rescue and rehabilitate the horses via the DVS, on condition that they would be confiscated and prosecution would be followed up by the DVS, however the DVS Sabah has been reluctant to do this at every step.

Animal welfare and responsible ownership is beginning to grow as a movement within Malaysia thanks to animal welfare groups like the SPCA Selangor, their tireless work is for animals such as pets and companions, and in the case of these horses, for sport and for the people that take pleasure in their companionship. The Government’s job is to enforce the Law guiding such use of animals and ensuring the animals wellbeing. In this case the enforcement role has failed.

The horses are paying the price for this failing with their lives and continued suffering.

The WSPA and the SPCA Selangor will continue to call for justice to be brought for the remaining horses through confiscation and prosecution of the owner. The WSPA and SPCA Selangor will begin a campaign to ask tourists to think twice before going to Sabah for holiday (focus for Australia and New Zealand), and we will lobby the FEI and the EAM to avoid Sabah as an Equine event destination in the future.

This case is far from solved.

Dawn Peacock

Member Society Manager

World Society for the Protection of Animals

(WSPA Asia)

19th Floor Olympia Thai Tower

Ratchadaphisek Rd Samsennok

Huay Kwang Bangkok

10320

Thailand

Tel. +66818255716

www.wspa-international.org

dawnpeacock@wspa-asia.org