

RUNNING ON RESERVES

# 'NOT GIVING UP ON THE ZOO NEGARA FAMILY'

Zoo's deputy chief appeals to Malaysians to donate generously

DAWN CHAN  
KUALA LUMPUR  
news@nst.com.my

**W**ALKING through Zoo Negara's main entrance, which of late has been devoid of the hustle and bustle of excited visitors, has been a heartbreaking experience for Zoo Negara deputy president Rosly @ Rahmat Ahmat Lana.

With its shutters down and closed to visitors since the enforcement of the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), this only meant that the national zoo's revenue, derived mainly from ticket sales, has plummeted to zero.

Currently surviving on monetary donations from the public obtained during the MCO and paying visitors during the Recovery MCO, which can last only for the next three to four months, Rosly is racing against time to raise more to keep Malaysia's first local zoo afloat.

The worry is causing Rosly sleepless nights. Yet it hasn't stopped him from going to the zoo daily to ensure operations continue to run smoothly under strict standard operating procedures.

He said it was also vital for him to ensure that his 140 staff as well as the animals, such as giant pandas, Malayan tigers and spotted deer, were hale and hearty during the pandemic.

"I take a look at the animals and wonder what their fate is in the future. There are over 4,000 animals in our care and they must be fed sufficiently despite the tough financial circumstances.

"Thank God they are safe and in good health. There are no problems so far as I am more than



Rosly @ Rahmat Ahmat Lana

committed to taking care of them and seeing to their needs — from their food and vitamins to medical attention."

Rosly said they "lived a nightmare" during the MCO in March when the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic forced them to dip into their emergency funds of RM1 million to keep the zoo going.

The zoo, opened in 1963 and managed by the Malaysian Zoological Society, needs RMI million each month to operate.

The Energy and Natural Resources Ministry then provided relief, channelling RM1.3 million. Donation drives through the Zoo Negara adoption package also raised about RM8 million.

They also received donations of vegetables and meat from farmers and butchers who could not sell their produce at that time.

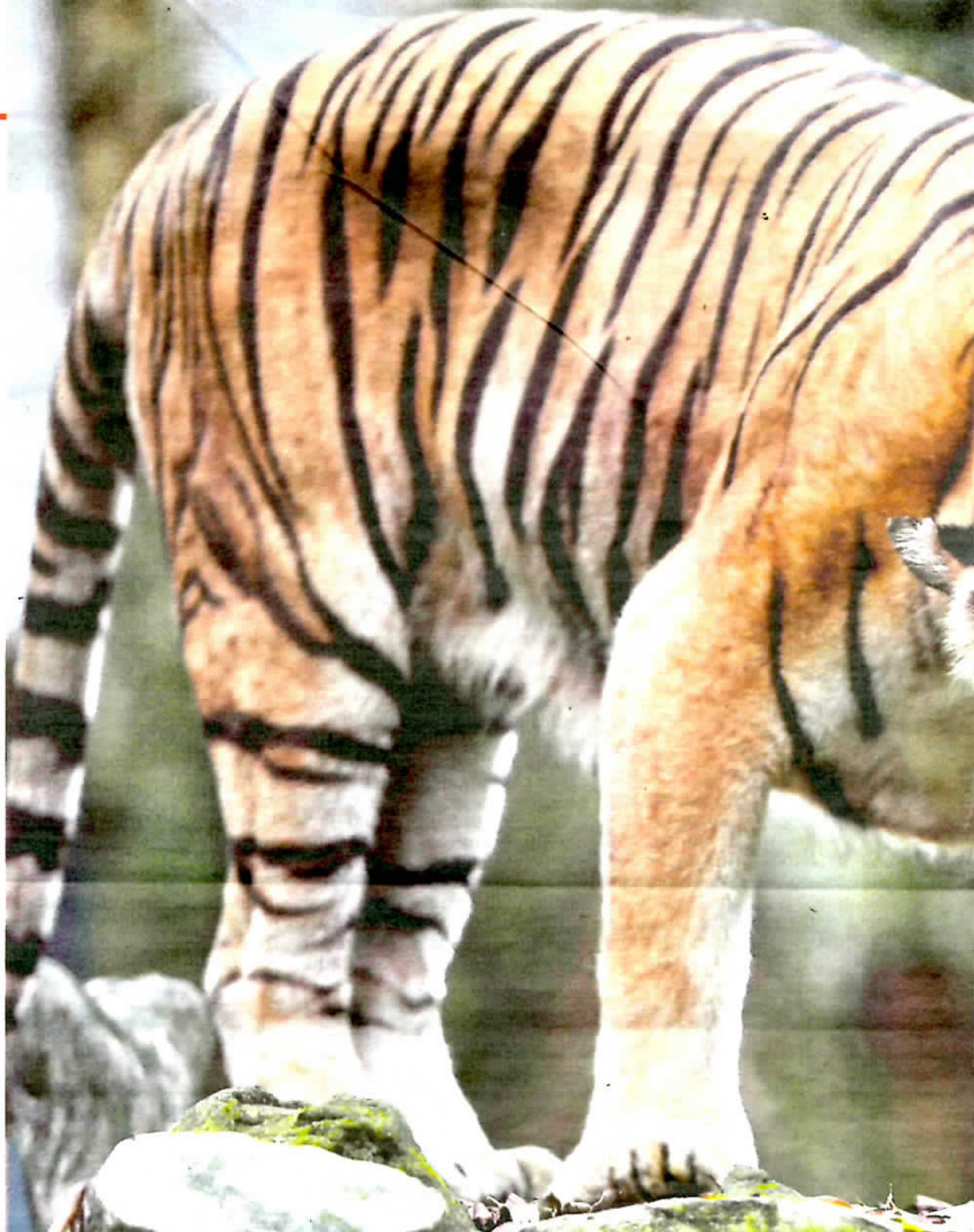
The Malaysian Department of Quarantine and Inspection Services, added Rosly, also donated meat and vegetables to feed the animals.

Rosly said the assistance helped them tremendously in the first few critical months and they were glad to have emerged from the challenges and finally have breathing room.

"Now, we are about to relive the same nightmare if we fail to gather funds to keep the zoo going as we have no visitors at all.

"I am keeping my fingers crossed that the CMCO will end on Dec 6 as scheduled. If not, we will run into deeper problems as we are a non-governmental organisation and we cannot rely solely on government assistance.

"My main priority now are the animals and they must be fed and well taken care of, no matter what. Closing Zoo Negara is not an option. It has to remain open



A Malayan tiger named Jati eating its dinner of raw meat at Zoo Negara in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIX BY EFFENDY RASHID

for the people.

"Something proactive has to be done from now on. Every day, I think of ways to raise funds whether it is monetary or food for the animals. On top of that, Zoo Negara staff continue to get their full salaries despite shorter working hours and none of them has been laid off."

Rosly said he remained committed to keeping the Zoo Negara family intact.

"We are not giving up and Zoo Negara will never close down. Otherwise, where are we going to send the animals to? Our Malayan tigers will not be able to survive in the jungle due to their inability to forage for their own food. Where can our giraffes go?"

Describing Malaysians as compassionate, generous and an animal-loving lot, Rosly is confident that his public appeal for donations, whether in the form of money or food, will be granted. During the MCO, assistance came

in even from visitors from the United States and Italy.

Rosly said they were now close to their wits' ends and he had no choice but to be "thick-skinned" to openly seek donations for the sake of the zoo and animals.

"When the CMCO first started, we still had funds as we thought the restrictions would last only a month. But at that time, we held back from asking for public donations as we were shy to do so.

"Now, we want to gather the funds as early as possible to ensure that we can operate even after the current reserve of three to four months finishes.

"We have just kickstarted the donation appeal on our website. We do not know if the response will be good or otherwise. I believe Malaysians love animals. Every little help counts. Even 20 sen that we received from schoolchildren during the MCO is precious. I appeal for public kindness."

Rosly added that he would exhaust all possible avenues to get assistance, such as reaching out to the Selangor government's tourism sector and exploring the sale of advance ticket packages to the public and tourism agencies, including sourcing new corporate sponsors.

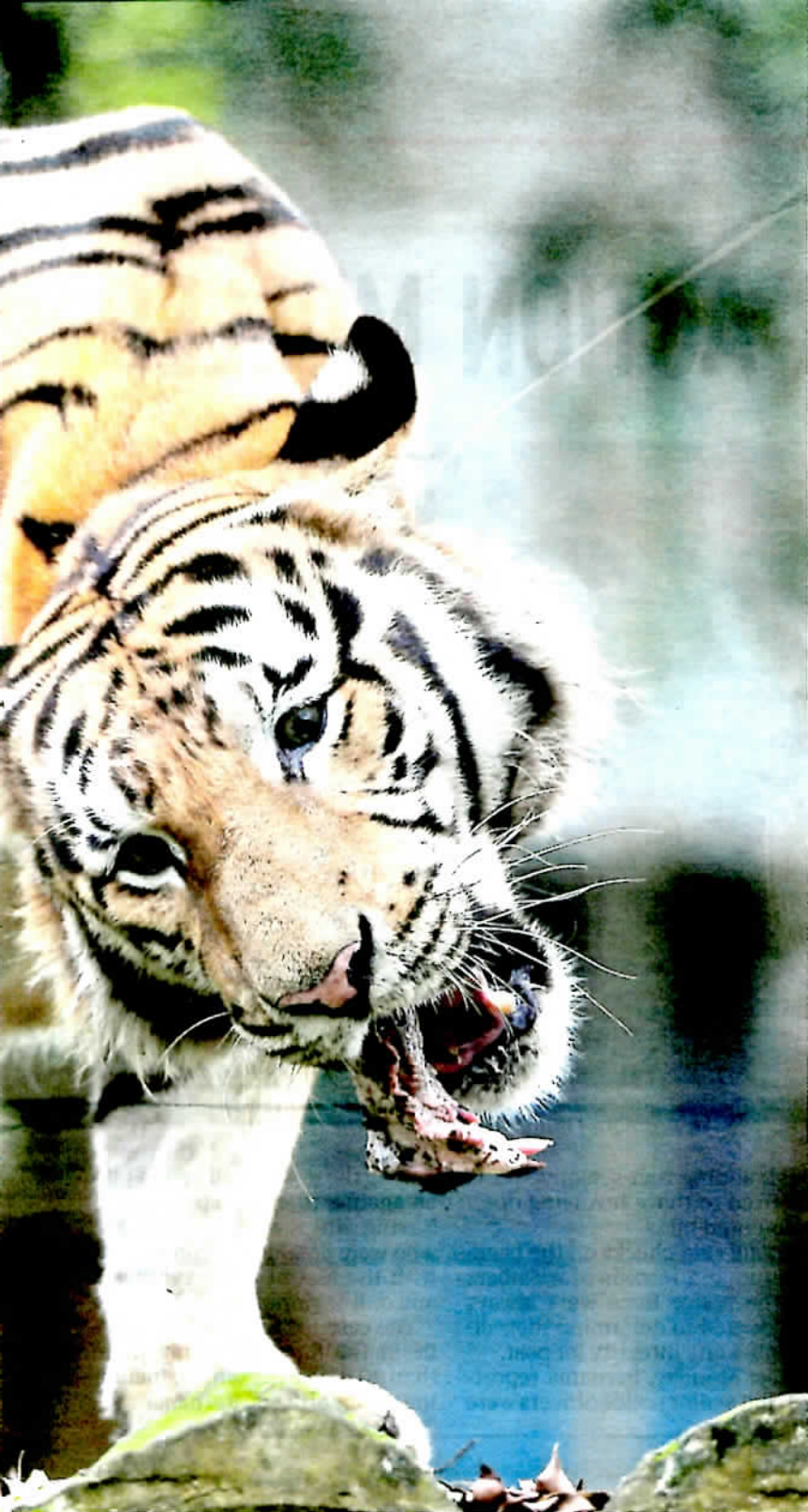
He added that he was appreciative of the government's assistance to Zoo Negara in the past.

Zoo Negara zoology, veterinary and Giant Panda Conservation Centre director Dr Mat Naim Ramli reportedly said that RM1.3 million given by the government covered the zoo's operations for a month.

This was including RM689,000 to pay for panda insurance, while the rest went to animal food and medical expenses.

Page 1 caption: The Malayan tiger named Kitty in its enclosure at Zoo Negara. PIC BY EFFENDY RASHID





## Preacher inspired by cat lover to help zoo

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Muslim preacher Ebit Lew's chance meeting with an animal lover on Sunday reignited his wish to channel assistance to Zoo Negara.

Inspired by a woman who fed stray cats in Shah Alam, Ebit wasted no time in getting into action to help Zoo Negara.

Within three hours after the noon meeting, he contributed 200kg of beef as well as 500kg of fruits and vegetables to Zoo Negara.

Ebit said he had met the lady, who works as a cleaner, at the opening of his new store, Elews Mart in Section 24 in Shah Alam.

He said he had wanted to assist Zoo Negara back in March when the Movement Control Order was imposed.

Back then, many people including Ebit and his children, supported Zoo Negara's "Adopt An Animal" initiative.

"At that time, I thought I could do more for Zoo Negara than just signing up for the initiative. I knew for sure that the animals needed food, too, and I wanted to help. However, I got busy and had forgotten about my intention.

"That day, the woman told me she feeds stray cats at the area. I asked if she needed anything. She said if I insisted on giving, it

would be food for the cats. So I gave her a variety of food and she cried, thanked me and even prayed for me.

"Immediately after that, I said I must go to Zoo Negara as I had wanted to hand over contributions for a very long time. It was the lady's presence that reminded me to do it," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Zoo Negara, he said, held a special place in his heart and he was still able to recollect his first school trip there when they travelled all the way from Pahang.

He said he had been to Zoo Negara up to five times so far, bringing along his children to educate them about animals and wildlife conservation.

"Zoo Negara is significant to the country as it carries the word 'national'. It needs our help and should be brought to a higher level of excellence.

"Malaysians love to contribute and I am sure they will extend their assistance to help the animals. I hope more people will come forward and companies will play their part by being corporate sponsors.

"The contributions from the public were overwhelming in March. I hope to see that happening again."

## Taiping Zoo coping so far despite lack of visitors

**IPOH:** Despite a vastly reduced number of visitors during the current Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), Taiping Zoo in Perak, the country's oldest zoo, is nevertheless coping well.

Taiping Zoo and Night Safari director Dr Kevin Lazarus said the zoo had been able to pull through because of the financial support it received from the Perak government.

"The Taiping Zoo and Night Safari comes under the Taiping Municipal Council's purview and therefore, we receive funding from the state government.

"So in terms of operational cost, we have no problems with continuing to look after our animals.

"We are also grateful that the state has allocated RM1.91 million for the 2020-2021 financial year," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Lazarus, who is also the chairman of the Malaysian Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria, said the zoo also sought and benefited from federal aid.

He added that operational costs for the Taiping Zoo amounted to about RM400,000 a month.

He also acknowledged that the zoo's revenue had dipped as it experienced a drop in visitors.

"During the MCO period, the zoo was closed from March 15 to June 15. So, there was no revenue at all. But income started flowing in during the Recovery MCO as we allowed visitors to enter the zoo with strict standard operating procedures in place.

"Under the current CMCO, the number of visitors has dropped again since most of our visitors usually come from outside the Taiping district."

Lazarus said that privately-operated zoos, such as Zoo Negara, might have to grapple with financial predicaments due to the movement restrictions.

"Zoos that are privately-run depend on revenue from visitors to finance their operations. So when revenue drops, it will definitely hurt their operations." **By Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan**



Dr Kevin Lazarus

## Minister: Zoos as businesses should not rely on govt aid

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Energy and Natural Resources Ministry allocated RM1.3 million to Zoo Negara through the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) in June for the animals' food supplies.

Its minister, Datuk Dr Shamsul Anuar Nasarah, said the ministry was aware that the zoo and permanent wildlife exhibition (ZPT) suffered losses due to the Movement Control Order and had implemented several measures to ease the financial hardship and protect the welfare of the animals.

"Zoo Negara is owned by the Malaysian Zoological Society, which is a non-governmental organisation. Perhilitan issues ZPT operating permits to Zoo Negara on a yearly basis.

"As a business entity, it should not rely on the government for survival although the government has implemented several initiatives to help them.

"In terms of short-term measures, the ministry allocated RM10.2 million under the Prihatin Wildlife Welfare Fund to affected ZPTs to ease their operational costs by covering food supplies, husbandry management and medicine.

"A total of 21 ZPTs have applied for assistance and the allocations have been channelled in stages since May."

He also said the government extended a 15 per cent discount on monthly electricity bills for six months to ZPTs under the Prihatin stimulus package; distributed 15 tonnes of items from



Yi Yi the panda cub eating bamboo at Zoo Negara, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.

the Malaysian Department of Quarantine and Inspection Services to ZPT premises; besides providing technical support to ZPTs, especially in husbandry management.

"As part of long-term measures, the ministry, through Perhilitan, organised consultation sessions with the Malaysian

Association of Zoological Park and Aquaria and ZPTs to review all regulations related to ZPT operations under the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 (Act 716) to ensure ZPTs become financially sustainable and safeguard the welfare of the wildlife." **By Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan**