

New-look SPCA soon

The soon-to-be revamped SPCA Selangor will not only benefit the animals but also the environment, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

THE word 'rebuild' presupposes that a person will demolish a structure and build a new one in its place. This isn't quite the case with Society For The Prevention Of Cruelty To Animals (SPCA) Selangor.

True, the society has rented a nearby bungalow from where they operate, but the place where the animals are housed cannot be properly called a building. In fact the animals are kept in rooms, makeshift sheds and enclosures.

"There was never any proper designs. Structures were just added ad hoc. Everyone is making do," says Christian Hillier, 47, a committee member of SPCA Selangor.

Nevertheless, SPCA Selangor is slated to be rebuilt next month. When completed, the new complex will include a reception area, consultation rooms for adoption and surrender of pets, surgery rooms with post-op wards and kennels to house up to 250 dogs and 250 cats. It is also designed to be environmentally friendly.

When introducing the plans for the new building, 52-year-old Christine Chin, chairman of SPCA Selangor, could barely contain her excitement.

"It's the first time a local council has approved a project for a shelter for animals," she says, adding that this indicates that the Government is serious about combating animal cruelty and raising the standards of animal welfare.

"The new direction we're taking also comes hot on the heels of the Animal Welfare Bill which we're hoping will come into law this year," she adds.

"Currently, the place is smelly and unhygienic. Although we haven't had a casualty, we worry. It can get slippery. There are slopes and open drains. Nothing has been done for years," says Hillier.

Chin says: "The Selangor SPCA was established in 1958 as an animal welfare charity. We have been on the current premises for more than 50 years. There is very little infrastruc-



(From left) SPCA's operations manager **Lorna Fisher**, **Chin** and **Hillier**.

PICTURES BY SHIRAZ ALI

ture and we are sorely in need of an upgrade."

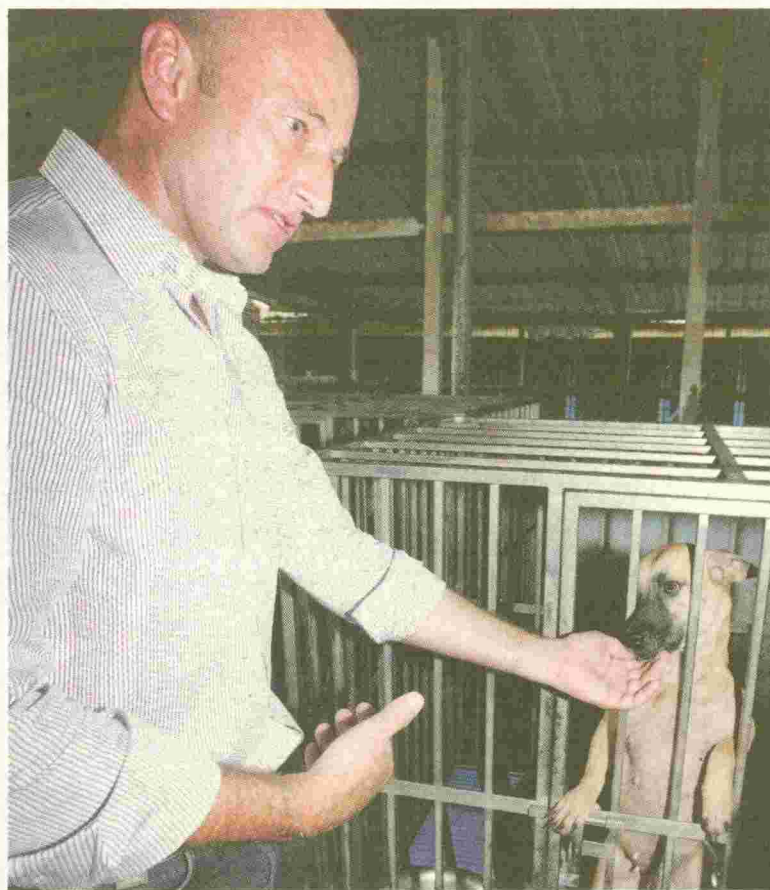
The plan to rebuild the SPCA hasn't been without challenges. "In 2007, we were served with an eviction notice. After the 2008 elections, when the State government changed, we put in our application again. Luckily, we were also granted the title to the current premises that sit on two acres. At the time, we also had the money to buy the land. I call it providence."

BUILDING A DREAM

Once ownership of the land was secured, Chin and her team started to work on their dream and vision of a new SPCA.

"When I was studying in San Francisco, I went to the SPCA there. It's a must-go place because it's such an iconic structure," says the trained accountant. "Then, when I was about to turn 30, I reached a turning point. I knew I had to become serious about animal welfare. So I came to the SPCA here and offered to help. Soon, I was asked to become a committee member and now I'm the chairman."

That said, Chin is insistent that the new building shouldn't be ostentatious. "We wanted to create a building that incorporated the principles of being eco-conscious - reduce, reuse



Hillier is excited about the plans made by the team.

and recycle. Our brief to the architects also stated the need to ensure that we combined both sustainability with thoughtful presentation."

To illustrate, Hillier says: "Look at those trees. They're huge and absolutely lovely. We don't want them chopped down. The preservation of these trees is paramount."

Chin does have an interesting plan for these trees though - a cat aviary. "I hope to create little platforms, something like branches on these trees. Then, with wire netting, we'll create tunnels and cats can go from tree to tree. Hopefully, they can play games. You know, like Snakes And Ladders."

Looking at the plans, Hillier explains that one of the things that animal shelters use most is water. "We would like to harvest rainwater and reuse it. All the water can be channelled into underground tanks," says Hillier, from Essex, UK. "Also, the architecture is very tropical. It'll be empty in the centre. We'll have a courtyard there. And we'll have grilles to keep the animals in. So, there'll be free flow of air and proper ventilation. This, we hope to reduce our dependence on electricity."

Without missing a beat, Chin adds: "We would like to use recycled materials but they tend to be expensive. So, we're working on that." They are also acquiring a machine that can convert dogs' excreta into compost.

During the redevelopment period, SPCA Selangor will reduce its intake of animals. That said, Chin insists all the other initiatives will continue, such as fund raising and education. An important one will be the campaign to re-home as many animals as possible.

With all the essential plans to rebuild SPCA Selangor in place, there is one aspect of the environmentally-friendly structure that remains in the pipeline for Hillier. "I'd like to have solar panels installed. This way, we can reduce the need to use electricity even more," he says.

Meanwhile, Chin's wish is to have someone like Cesar Millan come and visit the new centre when it's up and running.

"We've come this far. Remember, we were on the brink of eviction a few years ago and now, we own this land and rebuilding is possible."

"We need to reduce, reuse and recycle."

Christine Chin