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Jan 18, 2006

• AVA gets more teeth against illegal wildlife trade

By Lim Wei Chean

SMUGGLERS of endangered animals and plants will be slapped with penalties that have gone up 10-fold under the new Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act passed yesterday.

Anyone found guilty of illegal wildlife trade will face a fine of \$50,000 per species, up to a maximum total of \$500,000, and imprisonment of up to two years.

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) has also been given more legal teeth to act against offenders.

Minister of State (National Development) Heng Chee How moved the changes to the Act, which was passed in March 1989 and last amended in 2000.

Under the new ▼ advertisement · explore within this space law, the AVA has the right to search and check any premises or person suspected of engaging in illegal wildlife trade. It also has the right to arrest offenders and confiscate specimens for investigation.

Fake products that claim to contain parts of endangered species, such as traditional Chinese medicine that professes to contain rhinoceros horn, are treated as genuine and subject to the same penalties.

Mr Heng said according to Interpol, the illegal wildlife trade was second only to narcotics. Hence the tougher laws are necessary to protect Singapore's reputation as one of the world's busiest ports and a popular trans-shipment centre.

Dr Amy Khor (Hong Kah GRC) and Nominated MP Geh Min applauded the changes.

However, Dr Khor asked why the fine should be capped at \$500,000, a sum which is small compared to the multi-billion-

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dollar illegal wildlife trade.

Dr Geh asked if the AVA has sufficient manpower to enforce the tougher laws.

Mr Heng said the quantum of the fine is in line with that levied by places such as Hong Kong.

On manpower, he said the AVA will recruit more officers where needed. But he stressed that enforcement of the Act will depend on a network approach. There has to be cooperation between the police, immigration and checkpoints officers and non-governmental organisations.

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