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6,000 radio sets collected for tsunami victims

MEDIACORP Radio's Donate-A-Radio drive to help tsunami victims ended its first phase with a bang.

Six thousand radio sets have been collected since the donation drive started last Thursday.

Mediacorp Radio had appealed to the public to donate battery-operated transistor radios and fresh supplies of batteries.

Its spokesman Asaad Sameer

Bagharid says he is touched by the public's support for this project.

"What touched us most was that people from all walks of life responded. Some even bought to donate."

The donation drive entered into a second phase with the testing of the radio sets at Robertson Walk.

The sets will be handed over to Mercy Relief which will be sending them to Indonesia, Sri Lanka and

India over the next two weeks.

Said Mercy Relief Chairman Zulkifli Baharudin: "In a lot of the places where we work, you'll find the only means of communication today is through radio. And I think radio has been proven to be a useful tool to disseminate information about the progress of relief work there and where people can get help."

— NewsRadio 93.8

S'pore labelled 'a hub for illegal wildlife trade'

Strategic position may be attracting organised crime, says AVA

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ILLEGAL wildlife trade is on the rise in Singapore, according to statistics from the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA).

There were 97 cases reported last year, up from 68 cases the year before, and an almost three-fold increase from the 34 cases in 2000.

Star tortoises, turtle eggs, hard corals, snakes and iguanas are some of the most common illegal wildlife and wildlife products seized during AVA raids.

In October last year, for example, 40,000 pieces of air-dried python and monitor lizard skins worth

\$800,000 were seized from an Indonesian tugboat carrying crates of plywood products here.

The reptile skins, which were hidden among the plywood products in five of the crates, were to be imported into Singapore for sale and distribution. The captain was fined \$5,000 and jailed for three months.

Wildlife trade is very lucrative, said Miss Lye Fong Keng, head of AVA's Wildlife Regulatory Branch.

"Organised crimes may generate profits comparable to smuggling of arms, drugs or people. Globally, the illegal wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of US dollars annually."

The number of high-profile cases has led conservation groups to label Singapore a hub for illegal wildlife activities.

Responded Miss Lye: "Singapore is strategically located in a region that is rich in biodiversity. AVA and other enforcement agencies such as the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority are working closely to step up checks on wildlife consignments that pass through Singapore."

The AVA also attributes the steady rise in the number of reported cases over the last few years to greater public awareness of the Convention on the International Trade in



A Lear macaw, which can fetch up to \$81,700 in the black market, is one of the exotic birds coveted by bird collectors. There are only 130 species left in the wild in Brazil.

Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites), which Singapore is a signatory of.

Enforcement officers stationed at various checkpoints have also been educated on Cites, and the modes of wildlife smuggling operations.

The exploitation of Singapore's geography for illegal wildlife activities worries the local non-profit Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres).

The problem could be the lenient penalties for smugglers or owners of illegal wildlife and wildlife products, said its deputy executive director, Miss Tamara Emir. An offender currently faces a fine of up to \$5,000 (or \$10,000 for repeat offenders) and/or one year's jail term under the Endangered Species Act.

"There is a definite need to alter the current legislation. The penalty ought to be in relation to the number of animals involved, contrary to the current ruling of number of species. The penalty seems to be merely a slap on the wrist," she said.

According to the AVA, there were four repeat offenders between the years 2000 and 2004.

Noting that greater affluence and the Internet have made Singaporeans more able and willing to purchase live exotic — and often illegal — wildlife as pets, Acres says that individuals have an important role to play in stopping illegal wildlife trade.

Last year, the AVA investigated 21 cases of people possessing live illegal wildlife. The largest seizure occurred on Dec 21, when 26 animals were confiscated.

The AVA said there is a common misconception that keeping exotic wildlife as pets is "cool".

It warns that these illegal animals can spread diseases to humans and domestic animals and keeping them in homes could compromise the animals' welfare.

Said Miss Lye: "It is not 'cool' to keep and show off exotic wildlife as pets. Keeping illegal exotic pets is an irresponsible act."

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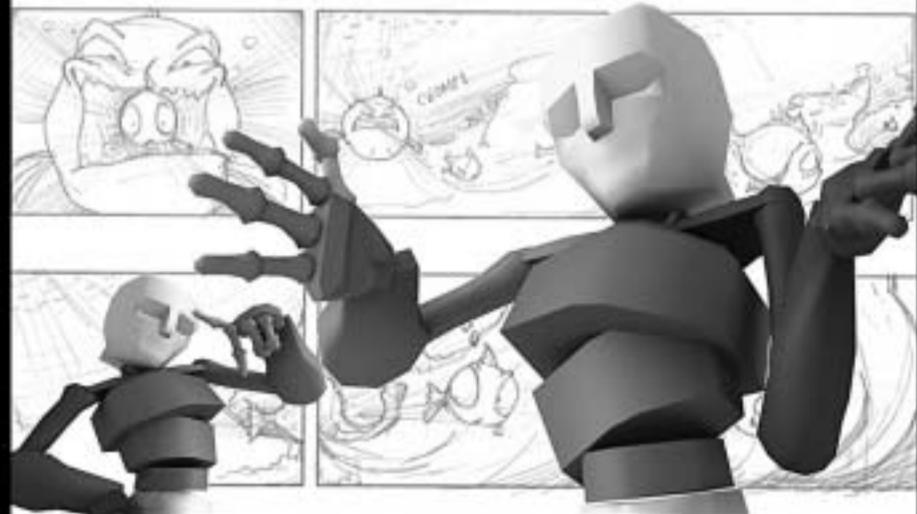
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