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Letter to Editor

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Unjustified Killing of Crocodiles

Friends of the Earth Malaysia (FOEM) an environment NGO in Penang, expresses shock and horror at the massacre of nearly 300 crocodiles in Indonesia's West Papua province. The loss of a human life is most devastating, but then the crocodile cannot be entirely blamed for following his natural instinct—killing whatever “prey” that had entered into his habitat.

Man's understanding of crocodiles has been very limited. Normally rare, attacks on human are related to defence of territory, protection of their young or accidental or intentional provocation by humans. Mankind's overwhelming response to members of the crocodile groups has been unreasonably repugnant. This would be that crocodiles are often perceived as monsters themselves because of their scaly, slithering and brutish form. What is most appalling is the crocodiles reputation as a man eater.

This ill-feeling toward the creatures has erupted into serious consequences that resulted in the unnecessary deaths of many of the crocodiles, which are not at fault. Crocodiles, often demonised as killers of men, are subjected to abhorrent treatment by the mob, whose only intention is to annihilate the creatures out of severe hatred and revenge. This appalling and immoral behaviour is nothing but a violent slaughter of defenceless creatures where the mob seek glory and revenge.

These animal abusers are a danger to everyone: they take out their issues on humans and non-humans and must be caught before they act again.

Man being on top of nature's hierarchy should be the protector of wildlife and animals, not the destroyer. FOEM totally concurs with Basar Manullang, the head of Indonesia's Natural Resources Conservation Agency, that crocodiles are God's creatures that need to be protected.

The mob should not take matters into their own hands. What they have done is totally against the law. It is time that police and the Conservation Agency work together to establish who is responsible for the killing.

The local communities should not have set the killing spree of crocodiles as a precedent for others to emulate this mob rampage. This is a dangerous trend. For example, if a tiger or other endangered species were to maul someone to death, will that particular species be killed in this atrocious manner?

Since crocodiles are a protected species in Indonesia, why is the Ministry of Environment and Forestry keeping mum over this issue? The Ministry should work together with the police and NGO in bringing to book the perpetrators responsible for initiating this mob rampage on this senseless kill. Crocodiles are subjected to the conservation law of the country, in which case protection should be accorded to them being classified as protected species.

Right now, the only effective way to do away with such merciless and unjustified killing is for perpetrators to be prosecuted and jailed for lengthy periods of time. That is precisely what FOEM expects the judiciary to do and not take a lenient view of perpetrators who commit crimes of violence, for this should be the first and last case.

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