

# Despite many laws, abuse still happens

**L**AST week, the police rescued a 7-year-old girl believed to have been left alone for several days without food and was locked in a room of a house in Sungai Dua, Penang.

Earlier, police had received a report from a teacher, who had expressed worry about the physical condition of the girl, who appeared weak and disorganised when she came to school.

Initial investigation found bruises on the girl's upper arms and thighs and she was taken to Seberang Jaya Hospital for examination.

The girl's 34-year-old father, a petrol station pump attendant, had been detained by police to facilitate investigation.

The issue of child neglect is not new. Time after time, we have read news of child neglect.

The main concern now is how this can happen in a country with many laws protecting child welfare and interest.

In this regard, it is worth to note that Malaysia has enacted the

Child Act 2001 (Act 611) to fulfil its obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 to protect the welfare of children below 18 years.

Act 611 was regarded as a comprehensive act addressing the issue of child welfare and protecting their interest, which was created and enforced in 2001.

Act 611 has repealed the Juvenile Courts Act 1947 (Act 90), the Women and Girls Protection Act 1973 (Act 106) and the Child Protection Act 1991 (Act 468).

Act 611 deals with the ill-treatment, neglect, abandonment or exposure of children where according to Section 31 any person who, being a person having the care of a child (a) abuses, neglects, abandons or exposes the child in a manner likely to cause him physical or emotional injury or causes or permits him to be so abused, neglected, abandoned or exposed or (b) sexually abuses the child or causes or permits him to be so abused, commits an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding RM20,000 or

imprisonment exceeding 10 years or both.

Although the punishment may seem harsh, many regard the section as incomplete as it does not specify the meaning of the word ill-treatment, neglect, abandonment or exposure of children.

As such, many parents or guardians are not even aware that their ill action amounts to child neglect.

The suggestion put forward by Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim to have a new act, which focuses on parental neglect of children in amending the Child Act 2001, is welcome and should be accepted.

Besides strengthening the law, the ministry and non-governmental organisations must work together to educate parents about their basic responsibility to protect their children from harm or danger.

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