

Easier to get HDB guide dog licence

Rachel Au-Yong

It is now easier for guide dogs to live in their owners' Housing Board flats, said Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan in a blog post yesterday.

Previously, residents who are visually impaired had to appeal to HDB for exceptions, then apply to the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) for a licence.

With the streamlined process, they need only approach the AVA for licensing now.

The Sunday Times understands that this is mostly a formality, with licences most likely to be granted as long as the dog does not belong to certain breeds, like the rottweiler or Japanese akita.

Although there are about 4,000 people who are visually impaired in Singapore, there are just three guide dogs here – two of which live with their owners in HDB flats.

Mr Khaw's announcement comes on the heels of Law Minister K. Shanmugam's call for clearer rules on guide dogs last year.

At a dinner organised by the Guide Dogs Association of the Blind, Mr Shanmugam had asked for a "compassionate, proactive inter-agency approach" in addressing

problems faced by the visually impaired.

Mr Khaw referred to two other agencies under the Ministry of National Development.

The National Parks Board, he said, is "guide-dog friendly," while the Building and Construction Authority released a guide last year for professionals to design spaces suitable for a guide dog and its owner.

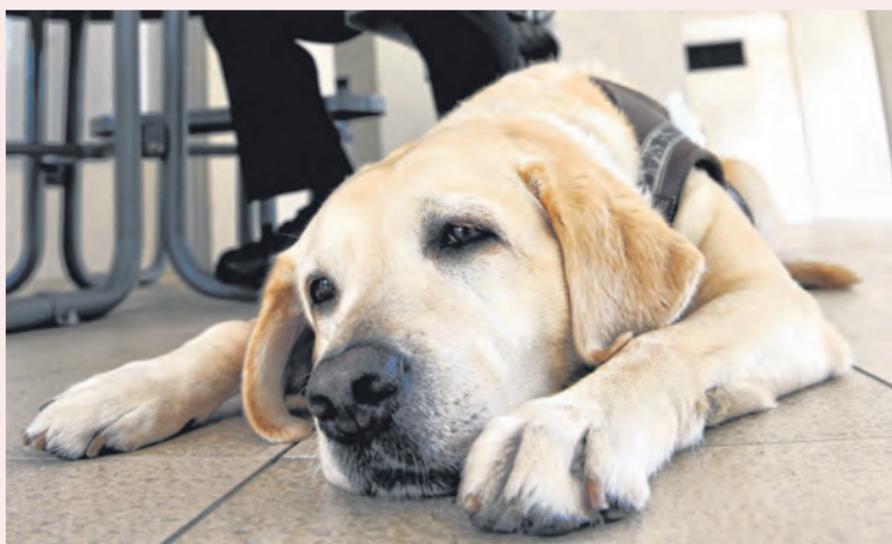
The minister said Singapore is not as guide-dog friendly as other cities, which allow them in restaurants, because they are not as common here.

Citing the report of a guide dog that protected its owner who had fallen onto a subway track in New York, Mr Khaw said: "To the visually handicapped, a trained guide dog is more than a life partner. Sometimes, it is a lifesaver."

Psychotherapist and guide dog owner Cassandra Chiu said it is "welcoming that government agencies are attempting to do more for the blind and their guide dogs".

However, more must be done to ensure the authenticity of guide dogs before they are imported and for the welfare of guide dogs that are retired from duty, she added.

"Any misbehaviour of a supposed guide dog at HDB estates will erode the painstakingly gained tolerance at the moment."



ST FILE PHOTO

There are about 4,000 people who are visually impaired in Singapore, but just three guide dogs here. Two live with their owners in HDB flats.

GETTING A LICENCE

The AVA requires proof that the dog has been trained by a school registered with either The International Guide Dog Federation or Assistance Dogs International.

It also requires the following information before the dog is imported:

- The owner's disability and need to have the dog accompanying him or her at all times; and
- Evidence that the dog has assisted the owner, or has attended an assistance dog training school for at least six months.