

New rabies law grounds more pets at Narita

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NARITA, Chiba—The revised Rabies Prevention Law, in effect since January, requires that, along with dogs, other animals such as cats, raccoons and foxes now be quarantined specifically to check for the disease before being allowed into the country.

At any one time, there are about 20 animals waiting out their two-week minimum confinements in climate-controlled two-square-meter cages or a six-square-meter room at Narita airport.

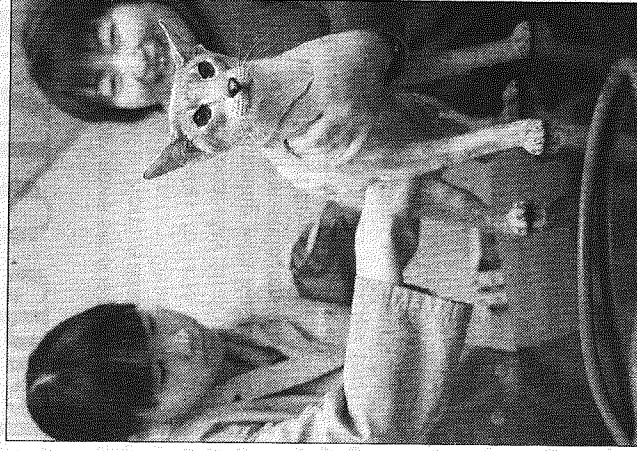
"Long time no see. Have you been a good boy?" Asami Kawasaki, a 33-year-old piano instructor queries her Siamese cat, Tama, which she has not seen in 16 days. Kawasaki recently returned from studying in the Netherlands. She spent nine years there—eight of them with Tama. The cat, she says, is like her child, and she has felt lonely during the quarantine period.

Kawasaki, anxious about her cat's condition, called the facility three times during the quarantine to keep tabs on Tama.

At the facility, quarantine officers carefully examine the animals. They examine them with stethoscopes and look into their mouths for signs of ulcers.

Satoshi Shiku, a 31-year-old quarantine officer, said, "There was one cat that wouldn't eat for three days. And I've been scratched plenty of times by cats."

Shiku said some cats were frightened of the examinations, while others raised the hair on their backs and tails to try and frighten him. He said that he has to try to keep the animals feeling safe and comfortable. "We're new at this (quarantining cats), so



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After a two-week separation, a cat and its owner, right, are reunited at the quarantine facility at Narita airport.

we're still playing things by ear," Shiku said.

Another quarantine officer, Juri Higashi, 26, said, "I feel sad when I hand a pet back to its owner at the end of the quarantine period." She said she treated the animals as if she were their owner.

Last April, a new law on the prevention of infectious diseases went into effect. The new law requires that monkeys be held in quarantine for 30 days because they are possible carriers of contagious diseases such as the Ebola virus.