

Headline	FRIM 15ha for Panda food		
MediaTitle	Malay Mail		
Date	25 Jun 2012	Color	Full Color
Section	News	Circulation	20,816
Page No	1,4	Readership	49,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	368 cm ²
Journalist	Meena Lakshana	AdValue	RM 4,205
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 12,615



FRIM: 15ha for Panda food

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A TOTAL of 15ha has been identified to be turned into bamboo plantations for the supply of panda food.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod said 5ha in Putrajaya and 10ha in Paya Indah Wetlands will be cultivated with four types of bamboo suitable for the consumption of pandas.

"The four types of bamboos are *Dendrocalamus asper* (*buluh betung*), *Bambusa ventricosa* (*buluh botol*), *Thyrsostachys siamensis* (*buluh siam*) and *Bambusa glaucesnes* (*buluh pagar*)," he told *The Malay Mail*.

"These bamboo species

are commonly found here. We wanted to create the plantations as it would be most feasible in the long run."

He said the two locations were selected on the basis of rotation, so that one area would be able to provide supplies if the other fell short.

Abd Latiff said all four types of bamboo are easily found in the country and officers from China will test the bamboo supplies before it is consumed by the pandas.

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Special land for pandas

It would take six months to a year to set up the planta-

tions, he said. The endeavour will cost RM500,000, including maintenance, over two years.

He also said there were no foreseeable problems in relation to the cultivation of bamboo.

"For example, *buluh siam* and *buluh pagar* are most commonly found because they are commercially cultivated. People also plant them for ornamental use," he said.

"Pandas only consume the small leaves and branches of bamboo as well as fruits such as apples and carrots."

Abd Latiff said the pandas' surrounding areas will also be enhanced with bamboo plants to simulate its natural habitat.

It was recently announced that the Chinese govern-

ment will loan two pandas to the Malaysian government, in commemoration of diplomatic relations between both nations which reaches its 40th anniversary in 2014.

The loan will cost the Malaysian government RM20 million.

The pandas will be kept at the Putrajaya Wetlands Park, in the land activities area.

Animal conservation groups have criticised the move, saying the allocation should be used for the conservation of other endangered species in the country.



JUST LIKE THE REAL THING: Authorities hope the enclosure for the Malaysian-bound pandas will be similar to this one at the Giant Panda Research Base in Chengdu, China. China engages in "panda diplomacy", using the endangered but iconic bears as diplomatic gifts to other countries. There are only around 1,600 pandas remaining in the wild in China, with some 300 others in captivity. — AFPpic