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Pandas to require 15 hectares of bamboo leaves

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 15 hectares 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 glaucescens* (buluh pagar)," he said.

"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. It would take six months to a year to set up the plantations, 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 government will loan two pandas to the Malaysian gov-

ernment, 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.