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Pandas' enclosure to cost RM30m

By MEENA LAKSHANA

THE enclosure to house the two giant pandas loaned to Malaysia from China is to be constructed at an estimated cost of RM30 million.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas said construction of the enclosure at the Putrajaya Wetlands park is slated to begin in three months and should be completed by the end of next year.

At a press conference yesterday, the minister said 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) would bear half of the cost while the remain-

ing cost is to be borne by the federal government.

A total of 1.16ha of land at the park has been identified.

Uggah said the enclosure would be managed by Putrajaya Corporation and a team would be sent to China for training on how to care for the bears.

"We will also be sending nine officers from Perhilitan (Wildlife and National Parks Department).

"We have also enlisted the Veterinary Medicine Faculty of UPM (Universiti Putra Malaysia) specifically to cater veterinary hospital services for the pandas," he added.

The media was also alerted of plans for a mini zoo to be built alongside the enclosure.

The minister stated a to-

tal of 43.69 acres (17.68ha) have been earmarked for the mini zoo, which would house several species of animals endemic to Malaysia such as the sun bear and a bird aviary.

The mini zoo is to be flanked by the Flamingo Park and the panda enclosure.

A further 15 acres (6ha) of land opposite the zoo, along Persiaran Persekutuan, and another 20ha in Paya Indah Wetlands would be cultivated with bamboo for the pandas' food supply.

The Malay Mail had reported on June 25 that four types of bamboo would be planted on the plots of land — *Dendrocalamus asper* (*buluh betung*), *Bambusa ventricosa* (*buluh botol*), *Thyrsostachys siamensis* (*buluh siam*) and *Bambusa*

glaucesnes (*buluh pagar*).

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod said the endeavour would cost RM500,000 and take between six months to a year to complete.

The Chinese government had decided to loan a pair of giant pandas to Malaysia for ten years to commemorate 40 years of relations between the countries come 2014.

The deal was inked in early June and will cost the Malaysian government RM20 million.

Animal conservation groups have since criticised the move, saying the money could be better spent preserving other endangered species in Malaysia.