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Zoo Negara to house pandas

Minister: It is more able to care for them

By **LOSHANA K. SHAGAR and JASON YU**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Come May next year, visitors to Zoo Negara will be able to see the zoo's latest addition – the adorable pair of giant pandas whose arrival has been highly anticipated by Malaysians.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas said the Cabinet decided on Dec 19 to house the pandas at Zoo Negara instead of Putrajaya's Wetlands Park after considering feedback from various organisations and the public.

"We feel Zoo Negara has better equipment and facilities to care for the pandas."

"The complex construction will begin in July, and we hope to complete it by April next year so the pandas can be brought here a month later," he said during a visit to Zoo Negara here yesterday.

Last June, the Malaysian and Chinese governments clinched a deal for two panda cubs – Feng Yi (female) and Fu Wa (male) – to be loaned to the country for 10 years to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two nations in 2014.

The complex will be built on a 0.6ha space within the zoo, with internal temperatures ranging from 22°C to 24°C and an environment that emulates the pandas' original home of Sichuan province, China.

Uggah added that RM15mil of the RM25mil required to build the complex would be forked



out by 1Malaysia Development Berhad while the rest would be borne by the Malaysian Government.

"Zoo Negara will bear the costs of maintaining the pandas during their 10-year stay," he said.

Zoo Negara president Datuk Zaharin Arif said a technical team would be formed from their experienced staff to manage the pandas.

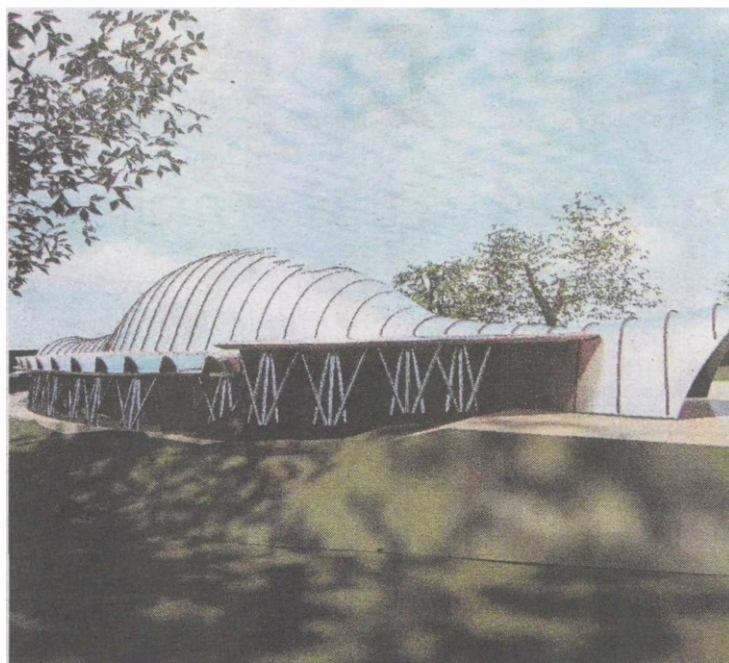
"We will send some officers for training in China while trainers from China will come here to educate our staff on how to care for the pandas," he said.

Zaharin said 16ha of land had been set aside to grow bamboo for the pandas' consumption, alongside the project in Putrajaya by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM).

"We expect to double our number of visitors a year to two million with the pandas here. A separate entrance fee will apply for the panda exhibit complex, but the amount will be decided later," he said.

Architect Zulkhairi Zain, who was part of the team that designed the complex, said they received assistance from specialists from other countries that have housed pandas and Perhilitan.

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Modern complex: Artist's impressions of the inside (left) and the outside of the enclosure which will house the pandas in 2014.