

Headline	Pandas to be a magnet for Zoo Negara		
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Pandas to be a magnet for Zoo Negara

STAR ATTRACTION: Four-year-old Fua and its female partner, Feng Yi, to arrive from China by year end

NURADILLA NOORAZAM

PREPARATIONS are in full swing in Zoo Negara to welcome a pair of young pandas from China in December.

It had to build a mini complex complete with an animal hospital, kitchen and laboratory.

The unique complex is shaped like a coliseum which will enable visitors to take pictures and watch the furry animals in action in a comfortable, natural habitat through a glass wall.

Zoo Negara deputy director Dr Muhammad Danial Felix said the complex, which cost RM24.9 million to build, would be open to the public by December.

"The complex will allow our staff to control humidity and temperature to suit the habitat of pandas.

"Humidity is very crucial and temperature must be kept below -24°C to ensure that the pandas are comfortable."

Muhammad said 3,000 bamboo plants comprising five varieties would be planted to accommodate the pandas' voracious appetite.

"We have been sending our staff to China to learn about pandas and their care, including the type of bamboo to plant.

"We have to be particular when it comes to caring for the pandas as we need to comply with regulations set by the China Wildlife Conservation Association.

"For the first three months after their arrival, the pandas will be accompanied by a conservationist from China before the re-

sponsibility of caring for them is given to local zookeepers."

Four-year-old Fua, a male panda, and its female partner, Feng Yi, are expected to become the most exciting attractions to commemorate the zoo's 50th year anniversary this year.

Fua and Feng were both raised in China's premier panda research and breeding centre in Chengdu.

They will form part of the zoo's exhibition for the next 10 years and Muhammad is hoping the pair produces baby pandas as part of a breeding programme.

Muhammad said that Malaysia's procuring of the pandas was considered a privilege as not all countries could receive them from China.

"Because of the pandas, the government has agreed to help Zoo Negara renovate and refurbish its facilities for the next few years.

"We are in the midst of meetings with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks to secure a RM50 million grant from the government.

"The grant will be used to relocate 17 species of animals to new and better homes. At the same time we will receive help to clean our lake which is currently muddy.

The lake has not been touched since it was created 50 years ago."

He added that the Forest Research Institute Malaysia would help Zoo Negara with landscaping to make it more environmentally-friendly.

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