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Local experts ready to receive giant pandas in mid-April

KUALA LUMPUR: Officers and local experts are ready to receive the two giant pandas from China that are scheduled to arrive here by mid-April.

Deputy minister of Natural Resources and Environment Datuk Seri Dr James Dawos Mamit told the Dewan Rakyat that eight officers of the Wildlife and National Park Department (Perhilitan) and four veterinary experts had been sent to undergo training at the Dujiangyan Giant Pandas Conservation And Disease Control Centre.

"They were sent for a one month training at the centre for the duration the panda was quarantined there before the pair is sent to Malaysia on April 15. Experts from China will also accompany the pandas here to monitor their local counterparts who will be looking after the pandas," he said.

Dawos said this when winding up the debate on the Supplementary Supply Bill (2013) 2014 for his ministry at the committee level here yesterday.

On the issue of expenditure for the pandas' feed, Dawos clarified that the bamboo species consumed by the pandas existed here while the Malaysian Forest Research

Institute (FRIM) had taken measures to ensure sufficient supply of bamboo leaves for the duration of the pandas' stay here.

"If fact, samples of the bamboo leaf from our country were also sent to the panda quarantine centre to familiarise the pandas with eating the leaves. We were informed the pandas liked our bamboo leaves," he said.

He also hoped that the expertise of local caretakers in looking after the pandas, including in artificial insemination, would enable Fengyi (female) and Fuwa (male) to breed during their 10 years at the National Zoo.

"Their presence will also enable us to conduct conservation research on the giant pandas and to develop and train local expertise," he said.

The giant pandas international conservation programme too was a symbol of the 40th anniversary of the Malaysian-China diplomatic ties and cooperation agreement signed on June 15, 2012.

Dawos was also confident the pandas could lure domestic and foreign tourists to the National Zoo as soon as they are exhibited in May. - Bernama