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## RAKSHAN CAN'T BEAR THE WAIT

→ PRIME PAGE 6



Pic by Aizuddin Saad

# Zoo prepares for pandas' debut

**BALQIS NASIR  
AND TEOH PEI YING**

**NEW HOME:** Panda complex will open to the public next month

**F**OUR rooms, a customised kitchen, clinic, laboratory, four veterinarians and six caretakers have been accorded the two giant pandas, which arrive in Malaysia from China today.

Zoo Negara deputy president Rosly Rahmat Ahmat Lana said a special quarantine area had been prepared to cater to the needs of Fu Wa and Feng Yi.

"Their activities and movements will be monitored 24 hours a day for security and safety purposes.

"The quarantine room will be the

pandas' night quarters after a month of adapting to their new home once they are ready to be introduced to the public."

Rosly said the veterinarians comprised three Malaysians and one from China.

"All of our veterinarians and caretakers received intensive training in Chiangmai, Singapore and Chengdu in China. "They are well-prepared to look after the pandas and cater to their needs."

Rosly said he was confident that the pandas would breed in a span of 10 years.

"Fu Wa and Feng Yi will be monitored by the vets in terms of their mating season and hormones, as male and female pandas can only be together for 72 hours a year.

"If they do breed, Malaysia can only keep the cubs for two years,

after which they will be returned to China."

The panda complex is the latest design and concept where animals and visitors can be in one room so that the latter can get a feel of the pandas' habitat.

Rosly said the panda enclosure would be opened to the public next month. "We expect a big crowd once the pandas are exhibited to the public. The complex will be opened from 9am to 5pm daily."

"If the response is overwhelming, we will extend closing time to 6pm. The panda complex is able to cater to 3,800 visitors a day.

"Every visitor is allowed to spend a maximum duration of 20

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minutes in the enclosure as the place can only hold 120 patrons at one time."

He said they expected half a million visitors in the first year.

Ticket prices are RM20 for adults, RM10 for children and senior citizens, and free for the disabled.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia director-general Datuk Dr Abdul Latif Mohmod said a panda expert from China had checked on the suitability of local bamboo as food for the animals last year.

"The pandas were fed buluh madu, buluh galah and buluh

pagar before coming to Malaysia.

"They can adapt to local bamboo and they also accepted the bamboo biscuits and bamboo cakes made from shoots, as well as carrots and apples."

Latif said the institute had planted these particular species of bamboo in the beginning of 2012.

"More than six kinds of bamboo, including buluh betong, buluh siam and buluh botol, are suitable for pandas. All six varieties can be planted and found easily."

"However, Zoo Negara will still import Chinese bamboo if the pandas refuse to consume the local

bamboo."

**Page 1 pic:** Rakshan Sai, 5, playing with a giant panda replica at the Conservation and Exhibition Giant Panda centre in Zoo Negara yesterday. Pic by Aizuddin Saad



## Zoo Negara's new panda enclosure

■ Panda diplomacy is China's use of giant pandas as diplomatic gifts to other countries. The practice existed as far back as the Tang Dynasty, when Empress Wu Zetian sent a pair of pandas to the Japanese emperor.

■ Fu Wa and Feng Yi symbolise 40 years of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and China.

■ The pandas would be given bamboo shoots and leaves from China before slowly shifting their diet to the bamboo here.

■ Two bamboo fields totalling 160,000 square metres will provide a steady supply of food to the pandas.

■ The enclosure is a complex shaped like a coliseum to allow visitors to take pictures and watch the animals in action in their natural habitat through a glass wall.

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

■ Malaysia will be the ninth country to receive giant pandas from the China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda in Sichuan.

■ Other countries involved in this research-based exchange and

co-operation include England, Austria, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, Japan and the United States.

■ The Chinese government presented two pandas, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing, to the United States in 1972 after president Richard Nixon's historic visit to China. Nixon reciprocated by sending back a pair of musk oxen.

■ Two pandas, Chia-Chia and Ching-Ching, arrived at the London Zoo upon the request by the British prime minister Edward Heath in 1974.

One of the two pandas being prepared in Chengdu for the long journey to Malaysia yesterday. Bernama pic

