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## Two-year journey to get pandas

**SELANGOR:** Wisma Putra official Muzambli Markam has changed his WhatsApp status to "Welcome to Malaysia" with a photograph of the MASKargo plane carrying pandas Feng Yi and Fu Wa as it landed on the tarmac at the KL International Airport.

He and his boss, Ambassador Rahimi Harun who heads the East Asia Division, had stayed up all night to prepare for the welcoming ceremony and to make sure they did not miss the arrival of the much-awaited pandas.

It was a relatively short flight from Chengdu for the pair of giant pandas but for the Principal Assistant Secretary, it marked the end of a two-year journey.

When the Wisma Putra deputy secretary-general set a key performance index in 2012 for the East Asia Division to bring the pandas here, Muzambli said: "Ambassador Rahimi and I both looked at each other and thought it would be tough."

The division pored through files and researched how other countries obtained panda loans.

"The most important factor that made this possible was the Prime Minister's personal rapport with China's leaders. That was the tipping point for us to get approval," Muzambli said.

Chinese officials told him Malaysia's application was the fastest to get the go-ahead, slightly over two months, back in 2012. The time since then has been spent preparing the exhibit area at Zoo Negara. The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry took the lead after approval was given.

"From then on, Wisma Putra played a supporting role to make it happen in time for 2014 with a lot of support from other relevant agencies," said Muzambli.

The young diplomat had to learn about the different types of bamboo, getting a crash course from the Forest Research Institute (FRIM). In China, both pandas had to undergo food-testing, with teams from FRIM, Wildlife Department and National Parks Department (Perhilitan) and Zoo Negara before their trip to Malaysia.