



The pandas arrive at the MASKargo complex before being transported to Zoo Negara. — Picture by Azinuddin Ghazali

Panda-mania as Fu Wa and Feng Yi touch down

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KUALA LUMPUR — Feng Yi stared through the bars of her cage at the frenzy outside as photographers scrambled to take the best shots of the panda shortly after she arrived at the MASkar Cargo complex at KL International Airport yesterday morning.

After a few seconds, the eight-year-old calmly turned around and went further back in her cage.

This first glimpse of Feng Yi marked her arrival together with male panda Fu Wa, also eight years old, to the country.

"Fu Wa is more prone to stress so it's best that we brought out Feng Yi to say 'hello'," said a Zoo Negara spokesperson.

A large crowd made up of the media members and officials gathered as early as 5am to greet the pandas, who are part of a project to commemorate the 40th anniversary of official relations between Malaysia and China.

The two pandas arrived at the airport at 8am after a two-hour flight delay and were promptly transported to the zoo, which is their home for the next 10 years.

They were the centre of attraction there as zoo staff and a group of pre-school children gathered to greet them.

There were two staff members who donned panda costumes and went about entertaining those present, including shouting out, "*Mana abang aku? Bila sampai ni? Dah panas!*" (Where is my brother? When is he going to arrive? It's hot!).

The children waved flags with panda images on them while gleefully chanting the names of the pandas.

Fu Wa and Feng Yi, which had taken a flight from Chengdu, China, will spend a month in quarantine at the Giant Panda Conservation and Exhibition Centre before the public can visit them.

The truck driver who had the honour of transporting the pandas and wanted to be known as Ibrahim said even though he had transported animals many times, this trip was memorable.

"The ride was long and slow due to the pandas' weight but everything went smoothly," said Ibrahim, who is with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan).

Zoo Negara's education department executive Junaidi Omar said everyone was ecstatic about the pandas' arrival.

"We have everything ready, and they have already grown to love our local *madu, pagar* and *betong* bamboos," she said.

Fu Wa and Feng Yi will also be given Malaysian names in a public contest.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is expected to announce their new names when he officiates the exhibition next month.

The 1.6ha panda complex has enclosures with steep terrain, wooden playgrounds and ice blocks that mimic their natural environment.

The enclosure also includes an exercise area, holding den, laboratory, veterinary clinic, incubator room and a monitoring room with temperatures controlled at

18°C to 24°C.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel said he expected over 1,000 people to attend the opening.

"Some RM60 million has already been spent in preparation to accommodate the two pandas. The government is willing to fund any of the shortfall if the project fails to cover its cost," he said.

"The most important thing is to ensure these two pandas live in a safe environment and I hope the pandas will be able to mate and add a cub to the family."

The number of visitors to the zoo is expected to increase by 500,000 to 1.3 million a year with the arrival of the pandas.

Fu Wa and Feng Yi will be cared for by a team of 13 people, including a veterinarian from China, Zoo Negara and Perhilitan staff and eight technical assistants.

Only up to 3,000 visitors will be allowed to visit daily and the exhibition will be open from 9am to 5pm with tickets priced at RM20 for adults and RM10 for children and senior citizens.