

All ready to welcome Fu Wa and Feng Yi

KUALA LUMPUR: The wait is almost over for the public eager to wish *selamat datang* to the pair of giant pandas from China, who are expected to set foot on Malaysian soil at 6.30am tomorrow.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel said the two pandas, Fu Wa (male) and Feng Yi (female), would be transported from Chengdu, China, via a MAS-kargo flight.

"The pandas will be flying on a special flight and will arrive at the Animal Hotel, MASKargo complex at Kuala Lumpur International Airport," he said yesterday.

The 8-year-old pandas will then be taken to Zoo Negara, where they will be quarantined in a state-of-the-art air-conditioned enclosure for a month.

Palanivel said the pandas, on loan from China for 10 years under

a giant panda international conservation programme, symbolised 40 years of good relations with China.

Malaysia will conduct conservation research on the pandas, while training local experts.

"The experience and expertise gained from the programme can be used in conservation efforts for our local species, such as the tiger, gaur, tapir and sun bear.

"It is also aimed at increasing awareness on the uniqueness and importance of wildlife conservation and biodiversity."

A ministry official said the sending-off ceremony for the pandas would take place in Chengdu today before they departed for Malaysia.

The official said the pandas were put on a night flight to ensure that they arrived in Malaysia in the morning, when the weather was cool.

Upon their arrival, the pandas will be transported to Zoo Negara via a Department of Wildlife and National Parks lorry.

"A water cannon will be fired to welcome the pandas before they are taken to Zoo Negara for a quarantine period," said the official.

Zoo Negara deputy director Dr Muhammad Danial Felix said eight zoo officers had been trained to care for the pandas.

"Besides our staff, two experts from China will also accompany the pandas here."

MASKargo corporate communications manager Anita Kushairy said the pandas would depart from Chengdu Airport at 1.55am tomorrow for the five-hour flight.

"We are using our 2-year-old A330-200F aircraft, bearing the registration number 9M-MUD. Accompanying the pandas will be one vet from Malaysia and one from China."

Najib is expected to pay an official visit to China after May 31, which marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Pandas' Chronology

INFOGRAPHIC: NST

April 2012: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak made a request to loan the giant pandas during an official visit to Nanning.

June 15, 2012: Malaysian government signed an agreement with the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA), People's Republic of China (PRC) to loan the two giant pandas for 10 years. The agreement was signed by director-general of Wildlife Protection and National Parks Department (Perhilitan) Datuk Abd Rasid Samsudin and the Secretary General of CWCA Zang Chunlin.

April 11, 2013: Construction on an enclosure costing RM25 million started. The 6,475 sq km-enclosure encompassing three main areas will be kept under 24° celsius according to the pandas original habitat.

December 2013: Construction of

the modern air-conditioned enclosure for the pandas was completed.

April 16, 2014: The two giant pandas were originally scheduled to arrive in Malaysia but was postponed.

May 21, 2014: The giant pandas, Feng yi and Fu wa are finally expected to arrive in Malaysia.

May 31, 2014: Marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

