

Panda was not clamped for photo with Najib
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Images of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and other officials visiting the panda enclosure in Zoo Negara on Sunday caused a stir among netizens, who alleged animal cruelty.

Noting an object that appeared to be a clamp on the right forelimb of the panda Fu Wa, netizens claimed that the pandas were restrained to facilitate a photo opportunity with the VIPs, and to prevent them from running away.

However, Chin Chet Mooi, who adopted the other panda, Feng Yi, explained that the object was not a clamp, but a handle for the panda to hold on to.

"Just like all pandas from the Dujiangyan Panda Base, Fu Wa had been trained to put its arm on the armrest and hold the handle, so that veterinarians can take blood samples and measure its blood pressure," Chin is quoted as saying in Sin Chew Daily today.

She said the pandas from the breeding centre are trained to do so on cue from the handlers, whether it is during feeding time or during medical checks.

"Therefore, when it is time for the blood pressure measurement and to draw blood samples, they would habitually sit in that position and stick out their arm," she said.

Chin, a freelance proof-editor by profession, had adopted Feng Yi in 2006 soon after it was born at the panda research and breeding centre in Chengdu, via conservation group Pandas International.

Feng Yi and Fu Wa are currently on a 10-year loan to Malaysia from the centre starting last week, via an agreement signed with China in 2012.

The pandas will be under quarantine for a month at Zoo Negara before being displayed in public.

Meanwhile, former Zoo Negara veterinarian Dr S Vellayan concurred with Chin's statement, saying that the object in the photos is likely to be equipment to facilitate blood tests.

While admitting that he is not familiar with how it is done for pandas, Vellayan told Malaysiakini, "They will have different things for different animals – some sort of device (for drawing blood)."

Malaysiakini has also contacted Zoo Negara and several other animal welfare and conservation groups for comment, and has yet to receive a response.

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