

PM: M'sia to discuss with China on extending panda loan

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Malaysia will contact the Chinese government to discuss if it can extend the terms of the Giant Panda loan agreement which expires this year, said Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

He is optimistic that the Chinese government will give due consideration to the proposal as both countries have established strong and enduring diplomatic relations over the years.

“The giant pandas are due to be returned. I think I will take it up with the Chinese government, President Xi Jinping, to see some mechanism (for) whether we can extend the period of the panda stay in Malaysia.

“Knowing our excellent relations, I am rather optimistic that they will give due consideration and support to our proposal,” he said in his speech when officiating Zoo Negara's 60th Anniversary celebration at Dataran Dato' Ismail Hutson.

Also present were Deputy Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change Minister Huang Tiong Sii, China's Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing, Selangor Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari, and Zoo Negara deputy president Rosly @ Rahmat Ahmat Lana.

The iconic Giant Panda pair, renamed Xing Xing and Liang Liang, were loaned to the Malaysian government in 2014 for 10 years to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and China.

The loan was made under the International Giant Panda Conservation Cooperation Agreement, which allows Malaysia to conduct research on giant panda conservation, in addition to developing and training local expertise.

To date, Liang Liang has given birth to three panda cubs, Nuan Nuan on Aug 18, 2015; Yi Yi (Jan 14, 2018); and Sheng Yi on May 30, 2021, with Nuan Nuan being sent back to China in 2017 and Yi Yi and Sheng Yi last August.

Meanwhile, Anwar told a media conference that although the cost of maintaining the pandas was quite high, it was offset by the fact that the pandas are a major tourist attraction.

“We did not pay for the pandas, just maintenance only. And many people come to the zoo to see them. Many feel like it’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience to see the

pandas, so I will surely consider it," he said.

Earlier, in his speech, Anwar also announced an allocation of RM5 million for Zoo Negara's development programmes, including in terms of conservation.

Anwar said the amount would be supplemented by funds collected through the corporate social responsibility programmes by the companies involved, totalling RM5 million.

"With this RM10 million, we will control and arrange with representatives of the menteri besar and government to work together with the Zoo Negara committee so that we can improve the zoo's plans and projects," he said.

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