



## KERATAN AKHBAR

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The giant panda cub Yi Yi (left) with her mother Liang Liang at the Giant Panda Conservation Centre in Zoo Negara yesterday. Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar (inset) said the cub's name symbolises great ties between Malaysia and China. PIC BY HAFIZ SOHAIMI

## DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

## YI YI IS ALL ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

Name reflects strong Malaysia-China ties, says Jayakumar

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**T**HE panda cub, Yi Yi, is a symbol of the four-decade friendship between Malaysia and China. Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar said the second female panda cub was emblematic of co-operation between Malaysia and China that transcended giant panda conservation efforts to include stronger diplomatic and economic relations.

"Initially, three names were suggested for the panda cub. After discussions with the panda conservation centre in China, we decided to choose the name Yi Yi which denotes friendship.

"The name symbolises great ties between our country and China," he said at the second giant panda cub naming ceremony at the Giant Panda Conservation Centre in Zoo Negara yesterday.

He said the cub would be under the care of Zoo Negara for a maximum of four years.

Dr Jayakumar said the government has yet to decide if the cub would be returned to China.

"We will hold discussions with the panda conservation centre and Zoo Negara. It depends on how comfortable they (the pandas) are here.

"If there is a need to keep her longer, the decision will be fi-

nalised by Zoo Negara. If they want to send the pandas back, we welcome them to do so," he said.

Dr Jayakumar said the government annually spent US\$1 million (RM4.1 million) on conservation fees for one adult panda and US\$600,000 for each cub.

Present at the event were Chinese ambassador to Malaysia, Bai Tian, Deputy Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Tengku Zulpuri Shah Raja Puji, ministry secretary-general Datuk Zurinah Pawanteh and Zoo Negara deputy president Rosly @ Rahmat Ahmat Lana.

Yi Yi was born on Jan 14 last year and weighs almost 50kg. Its parents are Liang Liang and Xing Xing, a pair of giant pandas which arrived in Malaysia on May 21, 2014, under a 10-year loan programme.

Their arrival marked the 40th anniversary of diplomatic rela-

tions between Malaysia and China then.

The pair's first female cub, Nuan Nuan, was born on Aug 23, 2016, at the conservation centre here and was sent to China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda on Nov 14, 2017.

Bai said Yi Yi's parents broke the record for being the most productive giant panda overseas.

He said the success of the conservation efforts showed the pandas were comfortably at home in Malaysia, which also reflected the good relations between both nations.

"The name means friendship and it describes the decades of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and China," he said, adding that the panda cub would help raise awareness of the friendship between the two countries.

"I believe the friendship will

grow stronger, healthier, more robust and prosperous like this new giant panda cub," he said after the ceremony.

When asked on the cub's daily dietary needs, Rosly said Yi Yi was slowly learning to eat bamboo, especially the ones from Negri Sembilan.

Asked why specifically the bamboo from the state, he said the cub was unique and chose the bamboo out of several options given by the zookeeper.

"She is only 18 months old and still breastfeeds from her mother, so we allow her to eat bamboo only at certain times.

"Besides, her mother would snatch away the bamboo from her because she knows that her baby is not ready for solid foods yet.

"We monitor her activities and health from time to time as we don't want her to get injured."