

# Chinese loan causes panda-monium in Belgium

September 11 2013

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A giant panda cub at a conservation centre in Chengdu, southwest China's Sichuan province, on March 25, 2011. Rival Dutch- and French-speaking communities in Belgium are at each others' throats again, this time because of a loan by China of two pandas to the linguistically divided nation.

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The rare bears, a reliable draw for visitors, are to be housed in a zoo in French-speaking southern Wallonia, not far from the city of Mons whose last mayor is none other than Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo.

The bow-tied premier was promised the pandas this week by Premier Li Keqiang while on a visit to China.

"The arrival of these two pandas is an honour for Belgium and underlines the trust between our two nations," Di Rupo was quoted as saying Wednesday by the Belga news agency.

But Belgium's oldest and most well-known [zoo](#), located in the centre of the port of Antwerp in northern Flanders, is indignant to have lost out to the Pairi Daiza animal park set up by a [private investor](#) a couple of decades ago.

"We should have been able to count on the support of the prime minister," said Ilse Segers, spokeswoman for the Antwerp Zoo set up in 1843.

The establishment's indignation turned political after a member of the powerful Flemish separatist N-VA party, Zuhair Demir, accused Di Rupo of resorting to [diplomacy](#) to get the animals into the rival park.

The row front-paged the national press and headlined TV and radio news bulletins.

The prime minister's office brushed aside the claims of favouritism, saying that Antwerp Zoo, unlike its rival, had failed to file an offer to house the pandas, which will be on loan for 15 years.

"Pairi Daiza has begun building an ultra-modern installation in its Chinese garden that has perfectly integrated a Sichuan country setting,"

the animal park said.

China will, as is usual with loaned [pandas](#), send a special team to look after the two four-year-old bears.

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Citation: Chinese loan causes panda-monium in Belgium (2013, September 11) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-chinese-loan-panda-monium-belgium.html>

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