

Chinese pandas given by President Xi arrive in South Korea

March 3 2016



Lebao (pleasant treasure), a three-year-old male panda, is seen during a welcoming ceremony for a pair of giant pandas born in China, at a cargo terminal of the Incheon International Airport on March 3, 2016

A pair of giant pandas, a state gift to South Korea from Chinese President Xi Jinping, arrived in Seoul on Thursday to a red-carpet welcome.

Aibao (lovely treasure), a two-year-old female, and Lebao (pleasant treasure) a three-year-old male, flew in from the western Chinese province of Sichuan to Incheon international airport on a specially chartered flight, accompanied by vets and a handler.

Transported in a special cage, the animals received repeated health checks during the three-hour flight, the amusement park that will house the [pandas](#) said in a statement.

They then rode to the park south of Seoul in a vehicle with advanced suspension to minimise jolts.

South Korea received its first pandas from China in 1994 to mark the second anniversary of diplomatic ties.

But when the Asian financial crisis hit in 1998, the country had to return the pair, citing the high cost of keeping them.

Xi announced the new gift during his state visit in July 2014.

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye has made closer relations with China—the South's largest trade partner—a cornerstone of her administration's foreign policy and is understood to have formed a good working relationship with Xi.

However, ties remain troubled by differences of opinion over how to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, with Seoul favouring sanctions over Beijing's preference for dialogue.

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