

Tears as Malaysia-born panda cubs head to China

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Sheng Yi, a female panda, forages on bamboo leaves inside the panda enclosure at the National Zoo in Kuala Lumpur.

Tearful Malaysians said goodbye to two panda cubs Tuesday as authorities prepared to send them to China after years of delays because

of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Yi Yi and Sheng Yi—born in 2018 and 2021 respectively—were to be transported as part of an agreement between the two countries to send cubs born in captivity to China when they reach two years of age.

The female pandas are the offspring of Xing Xing and Liang Liang, animals China loaned to Malaysia in 2014 for a decade to celebrate 40 years of diplomatic relations. They will remain in the country.

Watching videos of the animals at Malaysia's National Zoo, panda lovers like 24-year-old photographer Cindy Lai gathered in hopes of catching a glimpse of the pair before their departure later in the day.

"It is an emotional send-off. I feel very sad since I will not be able to see the two lovely cubs," she said.

"I will definitely cry when they are loaded into the truck to be transported to the airport."

Housewife Tracey Lee, 37, choked back tears as she recalled visiting the pandas every week to make TikTok videos.

"I have been crying for many days at home. I will not be able to see them again," a red-eyed Lee told AFP.



The female pandas are the offspring of Xing Xing and Liang Liang, animals China loaned to Malaysia in 2014.

"This morning before coming to the zoo, I cried when I saw an old video of Yi Yi and Sheng Yi."

Yi Yi and Sheng Yi will be taken on a cargo flight to the Chinese city of Chengdu at 10:30 pm local time (1430 GMT), an official familiar with the travel plan told AFP.

A farewell ceremony attended by China's ambassador to Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur's deputy environment minister was held at the zoo.

"I hope that these Giant Pandas... can further promote understanding and

close cooperation between the two countries," Deputy Minister Huang Tiong Sii said in a statement.

In the wild, [giant pandas](#) can only be found in China's mountainous central regions, where bamboo—their favorite food—grows in abundance.

As part of its policy of "panda diplomacy", Beijing loans the animals to countries as a goodwill gesture.

There are an estimated 1,860 giant pandas left in the wild, according to environmental group WWF, and about 600 in captivity in panda centers, zoos and wildlife parks worldwide.

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