

SHA witnesses the signing of an agreement on giant pandas

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, and leader of the State Forestry Administration Mr Zhao Xuemin today (April 16) in Beijing witnessed the signing of an agreement on the implementation of the Central People's Government's (CPG) decision to give a new pair of giant pandas to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

The agreement was signed by Chairman of the Ocean Park Corporation Dr Allan Zeman and the Director of the Wolong Nature Reserve Administration, Mr Zhang Hemin.

The CPG had previously announced the decision to give Hong Kong another pair of giant pandas as a gift in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR. It was subsequently decided that the new pair would come from giant panda cubs born in 2005 in the China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda in Wolong, Sichuan.

The giant pandas are both healthy and lovely. The male (no. 606) is vivacious and the female (no. 610) is serene.

Today's agreement specifies the concrete arrangements for giving the giant pandas to Hong Kong. It stipulates that after the arrival of the giant pandas, Ocean Park should present them to the public only when they are physically fit for that. The agreement also enables the establishment of working relations between Ocean Park and the Wolong Nature Reserve Administration as regards the nursing, breeding and research of giant pandas.

Following the arrangements in 1999 when the CPG gave giant pandas An An and Jia Jia to Hong Kong and in accordance with the agreement signed today, the two new giant pandas will be cared for at Ocean Park.

"We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the CPG for giving a pair of national treasures to Hong Kong as a gift. We are also grateful to the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office and State Forestry Administration for their full support and assistance. This pair of new giant pandas carries the mission of building a family in

Hong Kong," Dr Ho said.

Taking advantage of the occasion, the Ocean Park and the Wolong Nature Reserve Administration also signed a related agreement on their co-operation in the nursing, breeding and research of giant pandas.

The agreement came into effect today after the signing ceremony. It is expected that the giant pandas will arrive in Hong Kong by the end of April. The relevant government departments and Ocean Park have been carrying out preparatory work. They are also liaising closely with the State Forestry Administration and the Wolong Nature Reserve Administration on the arrival arrangements for the giant pandas. Officers from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Ocean Park visited the China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda in Wolong, Sichuan, late last month to start preparatory work for the arrival of the giant pandas. To ensure that the giant pandas arrive in Hong Kong safely, both Ocean Park and the Research Centre will have personnel to take care of them throughout the journey.

The HKSAR Government will organise a handover ceremony when the giant pandas arrive. The results of the "Name the Giant Pandas" activity will also be announced on the same day and the pair will be officially named. There was an overwhelming public response with about 13,000 entries received.

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