

Pair of giant pandas from China welcomed in Indonesia

By **NinieK Karmini**
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Giant pandas Cai Tao and Hu Chun arrived to fanfare in Indonesia, where a new “palace-like” home that cost millions of dollars was built for them.

The male and female pair landed at Jakarta’s international airport from Chengdu and are under a quarantine period at Taman Safari zoo outside the capital before the public can visit.

The zoo hopes the seven-year-olds will mate and add to the giant panda population. It built a special enclosure and facilities that cost about 60 billion rupiah (\$4.5 million). Taman Safari president Tony Sumampouw told The Associated Press.

There are fewer than 1,900 giant pandas in their only wild habitats in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu.

China gifted friendly nations with its national mascot in what was known as “panda diplomacy” for decades.

Countries now pay to be loaned pandas, but they remain a potent symbol of Chinese soft power at a time when Beijing is seeking Southeast Asia cooperation for its ambitious plans to create a modern-day Silk Road that enhances its economic and political clout.

Zoo spokesman Yulius Suprihardo said the living quarters for Cai Tao, the male, and Hu Chun, the female, resemble a three-tier temple.

It’s on a hill surrounded by about 5,000 square meters of land and equipped with an elevator, sleeping area,



PANDA “PALACE.” Taman Safari’s new enclosure for giant pandas Cai Tao and Hu Chun is seen in West Java, Indonesia. The giant pandas arrived to fanfare in Indonesia, where a new “palace-like” home that cost millions of dollars has been built for them. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)

medical facilities, and indoor and outdoor play areas.

He said after the quarantine period, a “soft launch” for public viewing, could be held in late October or early November.

“During this time we can only see the adorable pandas from images, videos, and television. In the near future, Indonesian people can see [the pandas] directly,” Suprihardo said. “And we hope they can breed here; that’s part of our goal.”

Bugs are in the food by design at fine-dining bistro

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pillars, silkworms, and giant water beetles.

“It’s a new thing,” Thitiwat said. “You live in the world, you need to learn the new thing.” He said he’s cooked with pork and chicken for a long time, but insects are “a new world of cooking (and a) new lesson.”

For Kelvarin Chotvichit, a lawyer from Bangkok, the menu has been a revelation of taste and texture.

“When I taste this, it’s opened my new attitudes about foods: that insects are one of the foods that’s edible,” he said. “And it’s tasty, too. It’s not weird as you thought. And the feeling — it’s crispy; it’s like a snack. Yeah, I like it.”

United Nations food experts have pushed insects as a source of nutrition for years. Studies show they’re higher in protein, good fats, and minerals than traditional livestock. Even when commercially farmed, their environmental impact is far lower, needing less feed and emitting less carbon.

Wholesaler Amornsiri Sompornsuksawat is one the suppliers to Insects in the Backyard. The prospect of a new market — the fine-dining sector — is enough to make her salivate.

“I hope that people will eat more of my bugs and I can sell more of them,” she said. “We can have new menus, replacing the old familiar ones. It’s great.”

Insects in the Backyard has only been open a matter of weeks, so it’s too early to tell whether its mission to metamorphose insect cuisine is on track.

Amornrat Simapaisan, a local shop manager, tucked in quite happily to her watermelon and cricket salad on a recent evening.

“It’s tasty. It’s munchy,” she said.

But her dining partner exemplified the biggest problem the restaurant faces: that lingering feeling of disgust.

“I still have a barrier, something on my mind to stop me



SILKWORM SPAGHETTI. A dish of spaghetti with silkworm and cricket is seen at Insects in the Backyard restaurant, in Bangkok, Thailand. United Nations food experts have pushed insects as a source of nutrition for years. Studies show that insects are higher in protein, good fats, and minerals than traditional livestock. Even when commercially farmed, their environmental impact is far lower, needing less feed and emitting less carbon. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

from eating it,” said Patr Srisook, a freelance photographer. “But, yes, it kind of tastes like normal, nothing, like normal food.”

And that is the message from the restaurant itself: Judge us on our food.

“There is obviously the shock value with insects and that might bring some people in through the door,” Pairojmahakij said. “But, essentially, for the longevity or sustainability of the restaurant, and, for the sector of the edible insects as a whole, it has to stand on its own legs, so to speak. It has to be attractive. It has to be delicious. And it actually has to add something to the cuisine as we know it.”

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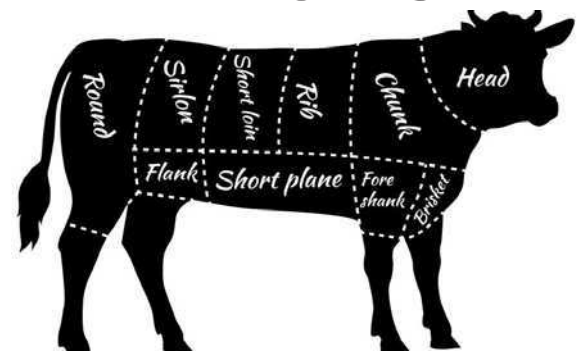
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