



BYE-BYE, BEI BEI. Giant panda Bei Bei explores his surroundings on his first day at the Ya'an Bifengxia Base of the Giant Panda Conservation and Research Center in Ya'an in southwestern China's Sichuan Province. Bei Bei was conceived through artificial insemination and born in Washington, D.C., to the National Zoo's Mei Xiang and Tian Tian in 2015. He quickly became a favorite on the zoo's Panda Cam, and fans bid a bittersweet farewell to the cub online with the hashtag #byebyebeibei. (Chinatopix via AP)

U.S.-born Bei Bei settles into new home at Chinese panda base

By Yanan Wang
The Associated Press

BEIJING — After an intercontinental flight on the “Panda Express,” a furry American darling arrived in his new Chinese home. Giant panda Bei Bei was a beloved figure at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., where he was born and spent the first four years of his life. By agreement with the Chinese government, the zoo had to return Bei Bei to China this year.

He is now settling into the Ya'an Bifengxia Base of the Giant Panda Conservation and Research Center in southwest Sichuan province. Bei Bei will be quarantined for one month while he adjusts to the time difference, learns to eat local foods, and picks up Sichuanese dialect, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Bei Bei was conceived through artificial insemination and born to the National Zoo's Mei Xiang and Tian Tian in 2015. His

Cambodian princess, classical dance star, dies at 76

By Sopheg Cheang
The Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Princess Norodom Buppha Devi, the eldest daughter of Cambodia's late King Norodom Sihanouk and a famed dancer, has died at the age of 76.

Buppha Devi was the half sister of the country's current king, Norodom Sihamoni, but was best known as a practitioner and promoter of classical Cambodian dance.

Cambodia's Constitutional Council, of which she was a member, announced she died at a hospital in Thailand. The cause of death was not given.

Buppha Devi was the daughter of Sihanouk's first wife, the late Phat Kanthol, to whom he was briefly married. She learned dance as a small child and became lead dancer in the royal troupe by age 16. In that capacity, she played a major role in her father's cultural diplomacy, especially in presenting shows for visiting foreign leaders, including France's Charles de Gaulle and Indonesia's Sukarno.

She was particularly well known for her performance and production of the Apsara dance, inspired by the female spirits depicted in stone carvings on the walls at Cambodia's legendary Angkor Wat.

Known in her youth for being headstrong, Buppha Devi was the subject of much gossip about her colorful romantic life, which sometimes put her at odds with her father. She was married four times, once to the son of an Italian diplomat and the other times to Cambodians of royal blood, and had five children.

She escaped from Cambodia before the

name, which means “treasure” in Chinese, was jointly selected by then-first lady Michelle Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping's wife, Peng Liyuan. Bei Bei quickly became a favorite on the zoo's Panda Cam, and fans bid a bittersweet farewell to the cub online with the hashtag #byebyebeibei.

With his handler, a veterinarian, and 66 pounds of bamboo in tow, Bei Bei flew on a private jet provided by shipping company FedEx and with a panda painted on its fuselage.

The giant panda offers a bright spot during a dark period in U.S.-China relations, as the two countries have been embroiled in a long trade dispute.

Once Bei Bei reaches sexual maturity at age six, he will enter China's captive breeding program, which is credited with bringing giant pandas back from the brink of extinction. They live mainly in Sichuan's bamboo-covered mountains and are threatened by habitat loss.



CULTURAL DIPLOMAT. Princess Norodom Buppha Devi, the eldest daughter of Cambodia's late King Norodom Sihanouk, attends the cremation ceremony of her sister-in-law, Ouk Phalla, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in this June 20, 2018 file photo. Buppha Devi, who was best known as a practitioner and promoter of classical Cambodian dance, has died at age 76. (AP Photo/Heng Siniith, File)

1975 Khmer Rouge takeover, returning to the country in 1991 with Sihanouk. At least five of her 12 siblings are believed to have been killed by the Khmer Rouge, and only about 10% of the royal dance troupe survived the brutal 1975-1979 rule of the communist group.

Buppha Devi served as culture minister from 1999 to 2004, and as recently as 2018 was directing classical dance troupes on performances abroad, though no longer performing publicly.

Prime Minister Hun Sen sent a letter of condolence to Queen Mother Norodom Monineath — Sihanouk's widow and fifth wife — calling the death of Buppha Devi the loss of one of the country's greatest experts on Cambodian culture and civilization.

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