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## **Centre for zoo critters to feel at home**

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KUALA LUMPUR: A new centre at Zoo Negara aims to provide a more conducive environment for the animals as well as educate the public on their welfare.

Zoo director [Dr Mohamad Ngah](#) said the facility would “enrich” the lives of the animals by introducing toys and developing creative ways for the animals to get to their food.

“Enrichment efforts have been carried out in the zoo since 2005. However, this is the first time that a centre has been set up to centralise such efforts,” he said during the launch of the facility at the zoo here yesterday.



Something different: Volunteers sewing up the 'happy sacks' at the Enrichment Education Centre at Zoo Negara, Kuala Lumpur Friday.

Dr Mohamad added that the facility, called the Enrichment Education Centre, would also serve as a resource centre to learn more about the animals.

“The centre has also been specially designed with large glass windows to allow visitors to see what is going on inside and learn more about the animals,” he said.

During the event, the media was brought to the centre and shown various enrichment tools designed to improve the welfare of the 5,000 animals in the zoo.

Among them was a *pinata* (a container made out of paper), which was made to look like a beehive and filled with food so that animals like bears would have to break it open in order to eat the food.

Small sacks, known as “happy sacks”, were also filled with groundnuts before being sewn shut and hidden around the enclosures so that animals would have to hunt for them.



Having a good time: Manja, a 15-year-old Bornean orangutan, trying to get groundnuts from a ‘happy sack’.

Unwanted fire hoses were turned into swings for monkeys, while PVC pipes were made into noise-makers for the animals to play with.

Dr Mohamad said when developing enrichment methods, zoo staff had brainstormed on how they could keep animals occupied in their habitat.

“We try to develop creative ways to feed the animals, instead of laying out the food before them.

“This will alleviate boredom among the animals and improve their overall welfare,” he said, adding that the increased activity among the animals would also provide a more entertaining visit for tourists.

Dr Mohamad said the enrichment efforts also sought to recreate the wild to encourage the animals to behave naturally.

Dr Mohamad said the centre cost RM150,000 and was built through funds from the zoo, conservation-based company [Way Out Experiences \(M\) Sdn Bhd](#) and donations from the public.