

THAI TIGERS SAFE AND SOUND IN HAINAN

By Cao Desheng (China Daily) Updated: 2004-05-13 22:34

ALLEGATIONS THAT TIGERS IMPORTED from Thailand to China were used to make aphrodisiacs are “groundless,” say officials. “All of the tigers are intact and in good condition in the breeding base and more than 50 cubs have been born since they arrived in the breeding centre,” Maitree Temsiripone said on Wednesday.

Maitree is president of Sanya Maitree Concept Co Ltd – a Sino-Thai joint venture in Sanya, Hainan Province – that arranged for the importation of 100 Bengal tigers from Thailand to a breeding base in South China’s Hainan Province 16 months ago. In recent days, allegations have surfaced in Thai media that some of the tigers were slaughtered to make aphrodisiacs. He said the company is building a Love World Theme Park in the tropical city for these animals, which will serve as a research centre for breeding the endangered animals as well as a tourist venue. It will open to the public in October, he added.

The tigers were shipped to China on Christmas Eve, 2002, as part of a joint project between China and Japan proposed by former Chinese premier Zhu Rongji during a 2001 visit to Thailand. However, the Royal Forest Department of Thailand was accused at the time of violating international



Workers of the Sino-Thai joint venture Maitree Concept Co hold two tiger cubs born after 100 Bengal tigers were imported from Thailand to Hainan in South China.
[newsphoto]

wildlife treaties by approving the shipment. Tigers are protected by the convention on International Trade in Endangers Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), but the animals are allowed to be kept for breeding, research and protection. He said tigers were also imported from Indonesia, Germany and the United States as well as Thailand and all were imported for breeding and scientific research.

The government-sponsored tiger research centre has ambitious plans to breed 200,000 animals in the next five years and eventually release some from a forest preserve into the wild, said Maitree. Senior officials from Hainan provincial government and the Hainan Tourist Bureau said on Wednesday in Bangkok that China has been cracking down on the trading and killing of protected wildlife and any attempt to smuggle and slaughter protected animals will be punished. In a statement following the press conference, officials said allegations that Maitree Concept is manufacturing aphrodisiacs from dead imported tigers are “groundless.”

Officials from the State Administration of Forestry, China’s top wildlife protection authority, could not be reached for comment Thursday, but sources at the administration said a special conference on the preservation of protected animals will be held in Beijing next month. On Tuesday, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra also fended off accusations that Thailand had illegally sold 100 tigers to China for commercial purposes, saying that Beijing had given him a satisfactory explanation. Thaksin was quoted by his spokesman Jakrapob Penkair as saying that China had convinced him that the sale of the tigers formed part of a wider Thai-Chinese tourism promotion programme, the Thai News Agency reported on Wednesday.

The prime minister made the statement after Thai legislators launched an investigation into the shipment of the animals in March.