



ORANGUTAN HOMECOMING. An estimated one-year-old Sumatran orangutan eats oranges inside a cage upon arrival at Kuala Namu International Airport in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Two infant orangutans confiscated from smugglers by Malaysian authorities in July were returned to Sumatra in November to undergo a rehabilitation program that prepares them for release into the wild. (AP Photo/Binsar Bakkara)

14 orangutans smuggled into Thailand sent home to Indonesia

By Busaba Sivasomboon
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — Fourteen orangutans that were smuggled out of Indonesia and believed to have been put to work at tourist attractions in Thailand have been sent home.

Indonesia’s air force last month sent a C-130 plane to transport the apes, each in a metal cage, for the five-hour trip from Bangkok to Jakarta, the Indonesian capital.

Indonesia’s minister of environment and forestry, Siti Nurbaya Bakar, welcomed the orangutans at Jakarta’s Halim Perdanakusuma Airbase and expressed excitement and gratitude for their return.

“This afternoon, we received back part of Indonesia’s treasure, 14 orangutans from Thailand’s government,” she said, adding that it brought to 68 the total number of smuggled orangutans returned from abroad since 2007.

Most of the 14 orangutans returned were rescued six years ago on the Thai resort island of Phuket and were sent to an animal sanctuary and breeding center outside Bangkok, where two of the animals were born.

“We believe they were smuggled into Thailand and put in private zoos or tourist attractions around Phuket,” said Tuenjai Noochdumrong, director of Thailand’s Wildlife Conservation Office.

Many private zoos in Thailand have animal shows where orangutans perform Thai kickboxing and other acts. Thailand is trying to shed its image as a hub for black market wildlife trading and has been cracking down on violators.

Over the past 10 years, Thailand has returned 52 orangutans to Indonesia as part of a program to fight the illicit wildlife trade and send animals home to their countries of origin, Tuenjai said.

Indonesia is home to about 90 percent of the orangutans left in the wild, but half its lush rainforest has been cleared in the past half-century in the rush to supply the world with timber, pulp, paper, and, more recently, palm oil.

As a result, most of the roughly 60,000 remaining apes live in scattered, degrading forests, putting them in frequent and often deadly conflict with humans.

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South Koreans mourn former President Kim in state funeral

By Hyung-jin Kim
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Thousands of mourners gathered on the lawn outside South Korea’s parliament to bid farewell to former President Kim Young-sam, whose landmark 1992 election victory ended decades of military rule and ushered in a series of reforms.

Kim, a towering figure in South Korea who fought against a succession of dictatorships from the 1960s through the ’80s, died November 22 of a severe blood infection and acute heart failure at age 87.

“We are here together to bid a final goodbye to former President Kim Young-sam, who was a huge mountain that oversaw our country’s democratization,” Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn said in a speech during a state funeral.

The televised funeral was held on the National Assembly lawn, where Kim was sworn in as president in early 1993 for a single five-year term. He was buried at the state cemetery in Seoul.

Mourners, dressed in black and braving cold wind and flurries of snow, sat in silence below a flag at half-staff, many of them sobbing or wiping away tears with handkerchiefs.

There has been an outpouring of mourning for Kim, whose achievements have been largely ignored since he left office in disgrace in early 1998, after accepting what many South Koreans still recall as a humiliating international bailout during the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis.

Hundreds of thousands of people paid respects to Kim at makeshift mourning sites across the country while television stations and newspapers ran feature stories daily.

At age 25, Kim was the youngest lawmaker and spent most his career in the opposition. His courageous, outspoken criticism against back-to-back dictatorships led by President Park Chung-hee — the father of current President Park Geun-hye — and his successor Chun Doo-hwan, earned him a reputation as a pro-democracy fighter, but also made him the subject of repeated political suppression.

As president, Kim reshuffled top military generals loyal to past dictators, brought transparency to the country’s murky financial system, and took other reforms.

Indonesia ‘Ghost villages’ eerie vestiges of volcano’s power

By Binsar Bakkara
The Associated Press

KARU, Indonesia — Crumbling houses. Vehicles overgrown by vegetation. Dusty kitchen utensils. A cassette recorder caked with volcanic ash.

This is all that’s left of the “ghost” villages abandoned

five years ago when Indonesia’s Mount Sinabung erupted a few miles away after 400 years of silence. Farms and homes once lovingly tended now serve as eerie reminders of the volcano’s power.

Sinabung caught scientists and everyone else by surprise when it sprang to life in 2010. The 8,070-foot volcano has been erupting sporadically ever since, killing 17 people in an eruption early last year and burying the villages of Bekerah in 2013 and Suka Meriah in 2014. Residents of six other villagers were also forced to abandon their homes.

All told, more than 30,000 people had to evacuate after a 4.3-mile area around the volcano was declared too dangerous to inhabit, and today, 6,200 people remain in temporary shelters set up by the local government or are staying with relatives while waiting to be relocated to new homes.

The Associated Press returned for a look at how nature is slowly reclaiming the villages. The haunting photos reflect how quickly life stopped when the volcano erupted and everyone was evacuated.



FINAL FAREWELL. A South Korean honor guard member carries a portrait of the late former South Korean President Kim Young-sam in front of a memorial altar during his state funeral ceremony at the National Assembly in Seoul on November 26, 2015. Thousands of mourners gathered on the lawn outside parliament to say their farewells to Kim, whose landmark 1992 election victory ended decades of military rule and ushered in a series of reform measures. (Jung Yeon-je/Pool Photo via AP)

Kim’s reputation was seriously undermined after his government accepted a \$58-billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in late 1997 amid the Asian foreign exchange crisis. Thousands of companies collapsed, stripping millions of people of their jobs in South Korea.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung contributed to this report.



ERUPTION DESTRUCTION. A cassette player (top photo) caked with dried volcanic ash is seen inside a home abandoned following the eruption of Mount Sinabung in Simacem, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Crumbling houses and personal belongings left behind now serve as eerie reminders of how life suddenly stopped when the volcano erupted and everyone was forced to evacuate. In the bottom photo, Mount Sinabung is seen through a crumbling house in the abandoned village of Simacem. (AP Photos/Binsar Bakkara)

Mount Sinabung is its location on the Pacific among more than 120 “Ring of Fire,” an arc of active volcanoes in Indonesia, which is prone to seismic upheaval due to volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.