



Suspects arrested for 26 endangered Javan rhino deaths

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian authorities have arrested six suspects in an international poaching ring targeting the Javan rhinoceros, a critically endangered species. The suspects are part of a network that used homemade firearms to kill at least 26 Javan rhinos since 2018 to get their horns. The horns are in high demand in Asia where they're predominantly used in traditional Chinese medicine and increasingly for making ornaments, said Banten provincial police chief Abdul Karim. He said the six men were arrested in a joint operation by police and the Forestry and Environment Ministry in May. One of the leaders of the syndicate, Sunendi, was arrested last year and sentenced to 12 years in prison and a 100-million rupiah (\$6,135) fine. Police and a team of rangers from Banten's Ujung Kulon National Park were searching for eight other members of the syndicate, officials said. Karim said an investigation found that Sunendi, who uses a single name like many Indonesians, and nine others had killed 22 Javan rhinos since 2018, while another group had killed four more since 2021. They sold the horns to Chinese buyers through a local handler, who is currently on trial. Police seized homemade firearms, bullets, gun powder, a steel sling noose, and other equipment used to poach rhinos. Rasio Ridho Sani, the head of law enforcement at the Forestry and Environment Ministry, said the population of the Javan rhino is declining and only about 80 mature animals remain, mostly in the Ujung Kulon National Park in the western part of Indonesia's main Java island. They are threatened by destruction of tropical forest habitat and poachers, he said. "Poaching of protected animals is a serious crime and is of international concern," Sani said. "We are working closely with the Banten Regional Police to search and arrest the perpetrators of animal poaching crimes who managed to escape during the operation."

Fire sweeps Thailand's famous Chatuchak Weekend Market

BANGKOK (AP) — Hundreds of caged animals died after a fire struck Chatuchak Weekend Market, one of the most famous markets in Thailand's capital. The fire was reported early in the morning and quickly swept across more than 100 shops in the market's pet section, according to the Bangkok government. Officials said it took them about an hour to bring the fire under control. There were no reports of human casualties, but Thai media reports suggested that the fire killed several hundred animals, including puppies, fish, snakes, birds, and rabbits, kept in cages and locked inside the shops. The cause of the fire is under investigation, said Bangkok governor Chadchart Sittipunt, who visited the scene after the fire was put out. Officials could be seen at the site in the morning, inspecting the charred shops or breaking metal gates to bring out animals that survived the fire. Officials are estimating the cost of damage and said affected shop owners could register for compensation. The sprawling weekend market is a major tourist draw, bringing in shoppers from all over the world to browse its hundreds of shops and stalls for items ranging from food and drink to clothing, furniture, plants, books, and pets. Wildlife organizations have often accused some vendors of involvement in the trafficking of rare and endangered species, such as turtles, tortoises, and birds.

Lunar probe returns with samples from far side of the moon

BANGKOK (AP) — China's Chang'e 6 probe returned to Earth with rock and soil samples from the little-explored far side of the moon in a global first. The probe landed in the Inner Mongolian region in northern China. "I now declare that the Chang'e 6 Lunar Exploration Mission achieved complete success," Zhang Kejian, director of the China National Space Administration, said in a televised news conference after the landing. Chinese scientists anticipate the returned samples will include 2.5 million-year-old volcanic rock and other material that scientists hope will answer questions about geographic differences on the moon's two sides. The near side is what is seen from Earth, and the far side faces outer space. The far side is also known to have mountains and impact craters, contrasting with the relatively flat expanses visible on the near side. The probe had landed in the moon's South Pole-Aitken Basin, an impact crater created more than 4 billion years ago. The samples scientists are expecting will likely come from different layers of the basin, which will bear traces of the different geological events across its long chronology, such as when the moon was younger and had an active inside that could produce volcanic rock. While past U.S. and Soviet missions have collected samples from the moon's near side, the Chinese mission was the first to collect samples from the far side. "This is a global first in the sense that it's the first time anyone has been able to take off from the far side of the moon and bring back samples," said Richard de Grijs, a professor of astrophysics at Macquarie University in Australia. The moon program is part of a growing rivalry with the U.S. — still the leader in space exploration — and others, including Japan and India. China has put its own space station in orbit and regularly sends crews there. The probe left earth on May 3, and its journey lasted 53 days. The probe drilled into the core and scooped rocks from the surface. The samples "are expected to answer one of the most fundamental scientific questions in lunar science research: what geologic activity is responsible for the differences between the two sides?" said Zongyu Yue, a geologist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, in a statement issued in the *Innovation*, a journal published in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Sciences. China in recent years has launched multiple successful missions to the moon, collecting samples from the moon's near side with the Chang'e 5 probe previously.



SAFETY & CONSERVATION. The shadow of Mount Fuji is cast on clouds hanging below the summit, top photo, and the sun is seen rising above the horizon, bottom photo, in Japan in these August 27, 2019 file photos. Those who want to climb one of the most popular trails on Japan's iconic Mount Fuji will have to book a slot and pay a fee as crowds, littering, and climbers who try to rush too fast to the summit cause safety and conservation concerns at the picturesque stratovolcano. (AP Photos/Jae C. Hong, File)

Climbing limits are being set on Mount Fuji to fight crowds, littering

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Those who want to climb one of the most popular trails on Japan's iconic Mount Fuji will have to book a slot and pay a fee as crowds, littering, and climbers who try to rush too fast to the summit cause safety and conservation concerns at the picturesque stratovolcano.

The new rules for the climbing season, running July 1 to September 10, apply for those hiking the Yoshida Trail on the Yamanashi side of the nearly 12,300-foot-high mountain that was designated a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2013.

Only 4,000 climbers will be allowed to enter the trail per day for a hiking fee of 2,000 yen (about \$14). Of those slots, 3,000 will be available for online booking and the remaining 1,000 can be booked in person on the day of the climb, Yamanashi prefecture said in a statement via the Foreign Press Center of Japan. Hikers also have an option of donating an additional 1,000 yen (about \$7) for conservation.

Climbers can book their slots via the Mount Fuji Climbing website, which is jointly run by the Environment Ministry and the mountain's two home prefectures, Yamanashi and Shizuoka.

Mount Fuji is divided into 10 stations, and there are four "5th stations" halfway up the mountain from where the Yoshida, Fujinomiya, Subashiri, and Gotemba trails start to the top.

Under the new system, climbers must choose between a day hike or an overnight stay at the several available huts along the trail.



The day of their climb, they are given a QR code to be scanned at the 5th station. Those who have not booked an overnight hut will be sent back down and not allowed to climb between 4:00pm and 3:00am, mainly to stop "bullet climbing," or rushing to the summit without adequate rest, which authorities are worried puts lives at risk.

A symbol of Japan, the mountain called "Fujisan" used to be a place of pilgrimage. Today, it especially attracts hikers who climb to the summit to see the sunrise. But the tons of trash that's left behind, including plastic bottles, food, and even clothes, have become a major concern.

In a statement, Yamanashi governor Kotaro Nagasaki thanked people for their understanding and cooperation in helping conserve Mount Fuji.

Shizuoka prefecture, southwest of Mount Fuji, where climbers can also access the mountain, has sought a voluntary 1,000-yen fee per climber since 2014 and is considering additional ways to balance tourism and environmental protection.

The number of Mount Fuji climbers during
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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 6/28

Bangladesh Taka	117.61
Cambodian Riel	4110.7
China Renminbi	7.2673
Fijian Dollar	2.238
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8082
Indian Rupee	83.368
Indonesian Rupiah	16352
Iranian Rial	42002
Japanese Yen	160.88
Laos New Kip	22147
Malaysian Ringgit	4.7175
Nepal Rupee	133.44
Pakistani Rupee	278.31
Papua N.G. Kina	3.845
Philippine Peso	58.49
Russian Ruble	85.758
Saudi Riyal	3.7518
Singapore Dollar	1.3561
South Korean Won	1381.4
Sri Lankan Rupee	306.02
Taiwan Dollar	32.52
Thai Baht	36.74
Vietnam Dong	25455