



KERATAN AKHBAR

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ELEPHANTS UNDER SIEGE

DOWRY NEEDS FUEL SABAH'S IVORY TRADE

Tusks can go for as much as RM10,000 as wedding dowry and family heirlooms

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IT'S called "bala", the elephant tusks, and it's no secret that the item is highly sought after as a wedding dowry by the Indonesian Timorese people.

For the Timorese people, who still hold on to ancient traditions, the ivory is the ultimate gift in seeking the hand of marriage from the family of a woman.

The community is historically known to have sought the ivory abroad because there are no elephants from where they come from. The recent brutal killing of a Bornean pygmy elephant in Sungai Udin in Dumpas, Tawau saw the tusks sawn off and buried before the eventual arrests of the six culprits who now await trial.

The motive behind the killing pointed to several factors including protecting a nearby oil palm plantation from being destroyed and extracting the highly-prized ivory.

A Timorese farm-hand, 45, said the tusk could cost anywhere up to RM10,000 each or more and that the ivory trade among the community still prevailed but not as prevalent as before.

"These days the tradition has eased as most understand that it is hard to find ivory and realise the consequences if they get caught are dire.

"But I have heard of families demanding for the tusks or at times as heirlooms, usually from well-to-do people," he said.

As early as three months ago, 10 tusks were seized by Indonesian authorities in Nunukan and it appeared the tusks came from Sabah.

An Indonesian estate worker, 54, was arrested and claimed he was East Nusa Tenggara bound to deliver the tusks as dowry.

The six suspects, aged between 48 and 68, remain in police custody pending investigations following their arrest a week ago.



Tusks belonging to a pygmy elephant. Its carcass was found at Sungai Udin in Dumpas, Tawau recently. PIC BY ABDUL RAHEMANG TAIMING.