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Jumbo killed by plantation guards

Initial probe shows suspects tasked to keep wildlife off company grounds

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KOTA KINABALU: In the end, it was not the work of poachers after all – two plantation guards engaged to keep wildlife off the company grounds turned their weapons on a Borneo pygmy elephant – and then sawed off its tusks.

This seems to be initial findings of the police as they arrested six suspects, including the two guards, at 12.40am yesterday around Kalabakan in Sabah's southwestern Tawau.

Tawau district police chief Asst Comm Peter Umbuas said they

believed they had recovered the tusks that belonged to the bull elephant that was found with about 70 bullet wounds at Sungai Udin, close to a Feida plantation, on Sept 25.

"We believe the police and wildlife authorities have solved the killing, which we think is a two-in-one. One was to protect the plantation and after it was killed, they decided to take the tusks," he said.

ACP Umbuas said the six suspects – five locals and one illegal immigrant – aged between 48 and 68, were arrested in a series of operations in the Feida Umas 4 area of Kalabakan till noon yesterday. Asked if the plantation company

allowed them to kill the elephants, ACP Umbuas said the matter was still being ascertained.

"We believe the elephant was killed because the guards could not keep the animal away. It might have been aggressive," he added.

He said the case was being investigated under the Firearms Act, including illegal possession of a homemade gun, while the Sabah Wildlife Department was probing them under the Sabah Wildlife Conservation Enactment for killing a protected species.

This carries a maximum five years' jail and RM250,000 fine if convicted.

He said police seized an assortment of legal and illegal firearms as well as bullets from the suspects, who are expected to be brought to court for remand today.

The three guns were a licensed single barrel 30-inch Iver Johnson, a homemade air rifle and a homemade shotgun known locally as *bakakul*.

They also seized an assortment of more than 70 bullets and spent shells, apart from a box of air rifle pellets, during the raids at houses of the suspects between 12.20am and 4am yesterday.

Other items seized included a licence book for gun ownership and

bullets, which was used to legally buy the licensed gun and bullets, he added.

On whether the ivory was meant to be sold, ACP Umbuas said it was difficult to say as investigation was still in the initial stages.

As to why there were so many shots fired at the elephant, he said the suspects claimed that many did not penetrate the animal, but it was clear the motive was to kill it.

He said police believed that they shot the elephant and then tied it up to remove its tusks.

He added that the tip-off came from a man.