



KERATAN AKHBAR

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Sabah racing against time to prevent rhino extinction

KOTA KINABALU: The health of Iman, Malaysia's last surviving rhinoceros, is declining with its tumour growing.

Sabah is staring at total extinction of the species.

The state government is now rushing to sign an agreement with Indonesia that will allow them to collaborate in rhino conservation via scientific methods, in particular getting sperm from healthy Indonesian male rhinos.

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Christina Liew, who told reporters about Iman's declining condition, said the rhino had been losing weight.

Estimated to be around 25 years old, Iman currently weighs 476kg, 44kg less than her average weight over the past few years.

"The problem is that the tumours in her uterus, detected soon after her capture in March 2014, have been growing since then.

"Although they are not malignant, they are spreading to her urinary bladder," she said, adding that surgery had been ruled out as it would be too dangerous.

The team led by Dr Zainal Zahari Zainuddin, who was looking after Iman in Tabin Wildlife Reserve at Sabah's east coast, had reported about its health steadily declining, she said.

Liew said she was told it could be a matter of weeks before "something takes place".

In view of that, she said they might go to Indonesia to sort out the legalities of a memorandum of understanding, including who would get the offspring if an in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) procedure turned out successful.

The last IVF attempt using sperm from Tam, the male rhino who died in May, was not successful due to the poor quality of the frozen sperm.

Sabah Wildlife Department director Augustine Tuuga said there were currently no frozen eggs from Iman and they hoped to harvest more eggs from her when possible.