

## Malaysia bans rhino move to US zoos

THE STATE government of Sabah in Malaysia has announced that it will not allow its endangered Sumatran rhinoceroses to be exported for a captive-breeding programme. The rhinos have been the centre of a controversy ever since reports circulated that the state's forest department wanted to export animals to American zoos.

The idea was to capture 10 pairs of Sumatran rhinos. Four pairs from

Peninsular Malaysia would go for captive breeding at Malacca zoo. Another six pairs would be captured from Sabah (formerly North Borneo). The first two pairs would be kept for breeding at Sabah's own Sepilok research station near Sandakan. The remaining four would be sent to the US.

Captive breeding may still go ahead. But the government says that the animals should be placed in sanctuaries where they could breed in safety and have a better

chance of survival than in American zoos. The World Wildlife Fund says that it would consider funding such a project.

The Sumatran rhino is one of the 12 most endangered species of animals in the world. There are only around 850 left in the world. Sabah has somewhere between 20



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and 40 animals. The proposed captive programme was initiated as an effort to conserve the rhino, but local zoologists fear that the chances of the rhino surviving in a foreign captive breeding programme would be very slim.