

Nepal orders probe into slaughter of rhinos

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An elderly Nepalese woman offers garland to a statue of rhinoceros as schoolchildren hold placards and shout slogans against poaching during a protest against killing rhinoceros, in Katmandu, Nepal, Sunday, June 13, 2010. Nepalese wildlife officials found a killed male rhinoceros Friday in a national park, bringing the death toll to eight during last two months, according to news reports. (AP Photo/Binod Joshi)

(AP) -- Nepal's government was investigating the poaching of rhinos in the Himalayan nation after 28 of the endangered animals were killed over the past 11 months, an official said Monday.

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Forest Minister Deepak Bohara summoned [conservation](#) officials and the chiefs of police and army Sunday ordering them to come up with a strategy to halt the

killings.

The [Rhinos](#) are protected by the government and the forests are declared conservation areas. Security forces are tasked with guarding them, however, increased political turmoil in Nepal has meant their redeployment to urban areas.

"Stopping the poaching is a major challenge for us. There is always an increase in poaching of wildlife in the conservation area when there is political problems," said Department of Forest and Wildlife Conservation official Megh Bahadur Pandey.

Indian rhinos are native to northern India and southern Nepal. Only about 200 remained before tough preservation laws began to be stringently enforced in the 20th century. Now there are an estimated 2,500 in the wild, though rhino poaching remains a serious problem.

The last count done in 2008 put the rhino population in Nepal at 435.

The Indian rhino is the second-largest of five living species, about three times the size of a Sumatran at up to 6,000 pounds (2,700 kilograms), standing 6 feet (1.8 meters) tall and 12 feet (3.7 meters) long.

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