

Malaysia customs seizes 159 kg in smuggled ivory

March 2 2016



Malaysian customs officials display seized elephant tusks during a press conference in Sepang, outside Kuala Lumpur, on March 2, 2016

Malaysian authorities said on Wednesday they had confiscated 159 kilograms (350 pounds) of ivory smuggled by air passengers, the latest seizures in a country used as a key Asian transit point in the illegal trade.

Customs officials, who said the haul was worth \$382,200, displayed the seized [elephant tusks](#) at Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

They said two Vietnamese men were arrested at the airport upon arrival last Saturday after they were found to be carrying bags containing 101 kilograms of ivory.

Later that day, another bag containing 58 kilograms was discovered at the airport. Authorities believe that bag belonged to a Vietnamese passenger who had flown in from Ethiopia, bound for Hanoi.

Authorities said they were still looking for that third suspect.

Traffic, the wildlife trade monitoring group, said the latest haul showed poachers were adopting new methods.

"Large volumes have traditionally been shipped by sea. So this clearly shows that smugglers are diversifying their methods," said Kanitha Krishnasamy, Traffic's programme manager in Southeast Asia.

The international ivory trade, with rare exceptions, has been outlawed since 1989 following the decline in the population of African elephants from millions in the mid-20th century to just 600,000 by the end of the 1980s.

But criminal gangs continue to exploit demand, mainly from Asia.

Tusks and other body parts of elephants are prized for decoration as talismans and for use in traditional medicine across parts of Asia, with China being a major market.

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