

A follow-up meeting gets underway next week in Bali, with the participation of delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Bali meeting is expected to produce a draft recovery plan for the world's tigers as well as a joint declaration from the countries' leaders, to be discussed at the next summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, along with funding proposals for conservation programs.

The Ministry of Forestry's director general of forest protection and nature conservation, Darori, was upbeat about the ambitious target to multiply Sumatran tiger numbers, citing an intensive breeding program begun several years ago. "I'm very optimistic that we can double the population by 2022," he said. "If within a year we can breed 15 tigers and release them into their natural habitat, then we'll be on track to achieve our target."

Darori said the breeding center, set up inside the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park's Tambling Conservation Center, had successfully bred four tiger cubs over the past two years.

There are an estimated 400 Sumatran tigers left in Indonesia and an additional 150 in captivity elsewhere around the world, the ministry says.

Conservationists have praised the government's intention but say more needs to be done to curb the illegal wildlife trade and reduce the incidence of human-tiger conflict near big-cat habitats.

Hariyo T Wibisono, coordinator of the Harimau Kita (Our Tigers) conservation forum, said breeding efforts should be taking place in the tigers' natural habitats, not in captivity.

"This breeding program must only be seen as a stopgap measure until we can also strengthen protection, especially with regard to the wildlife trade," he said.

He pointed out that the Balinese and Javan tigers had been driven to extinction in the past because of rampant poaching and human-animal conflicts.

"If we don't prioritize law enforcement, then there's a real fear that we'll still have forests but no more tigers," Hariyo said. "The lessons learned from the extinction of the two other species must not be wasted, otherwise Indonesia will be made to look the fool."

The Balinese and Javan tigers became extinct in the 1930s and 1980s, respectively, while the Sumatran tiger is currently classified as critically endangered.

Harry Santosa, the Forestry Ministry's director for biodiversity conservation, said the government would use the Bali meeting to push for \$175 million in funding for law enforcement as part of its conservation program.

The money, he said, would be used to build supporting facilities at six national parks that are home to Sumatran tigers.

Harry added his directorate received only Rp 15 billion (\$1.65 million) a year from the state for all of its conservation programs, not just for tigers.

Andjar Rafiastanto, from Fauna and Flora International, said the government should use the Bali meet to lobby neighboring countries to crack down on the cross-border trade in tiger parts.

"Lots of tiger parts make it to China through Hong Kong and Singapore, so we can use this event to get their commitment to end this smuggling," he said.

Meanwhile, Noviar Andayani, country director for the Wildlife Conservation Society, said on average 12 tigers a year were being killed for encroaching on human settlements. "We support the government's breeding program, but our observation in the field would indicate that the biggest threat facing Sumatran tigers is the potential for human-tiger conflicts, along with the

illegal wildlife trade,” he said.

The WCS, he added, had uncovered 18 tiger-smuggling cases since 2008, but only seven had been prosecuted.

Darori said he was aware of the shortcomings in law enforcement, which he said would be addressed in a proposed bill on forestry crimes.

“The bill will call for stiff penalties for violators,” he said. “Those caught smuggling even a single tiger whisker could face up a minimum of five years in prison. In addition, negligent forestry and wildlife officials could also be jailed in smuggling cases.”

Meanwhile, the Forestry Ministry is adamant about pushing ahead with a controversial new program to allow people to “adopt” captive tigers for as much as Rp 1 billion to help curb poaching. “People don’t understand that this is a realistic initiative,” Darori said. “Every day there are people who request to adopt tigers.”

“They will take good care of the tigers. It’s better than allowing them to be killed by poachers,” he added.