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### **Indonesian police nab politician for tiger trafficking**

Jakarta (dpa) - Indonesian police earlier this week arrested a senior provincial politician under suspicion of tiger trafficking, in what has been dubbed a test case of the government's seriousness in stopping a rampant trade in protected species, police said Friday.

Bengkulu police on Tuesday arrested Rabihi Kanel, leader of the Bengkulu district legislature and a member of the Golkar Party - the second largest party in Indonesia's coalition government - after catching the man in the act of selling a Sumatran tiger skin for 5 million rupiah (588 dollars).

"The man has been named a suspect and is still under investigation," said Bengkulu police detective Andi Triastanto, in a telephone interview with Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

Kanel was taken by police to city police headquarters in Bengkulu, 586 kilometres northwest of Jakarta, but as of Friday it was still unclear whether police would press charges against him.

The arrest is the first ever in Indonesia of such a senior political figure on wildlife protection charges.

Kanel reportedly bought the skin and bones of the tiger from the poacher who killed the animal approximately 3 months earlier.

Investigators familiar with the case said that a stuffed clouded leopard adorns the politician's reception room and that Kanel has a long history of dabbling in the illegal trade in tiger and other protected species, generally supplying animals to other politicians.

Bengkulu's governor will need to lift Kanel's parliamentary immunity which protects elected politicians in Indonesia from prosecution.

"I expect him to be charged because all the evidence shows that he violated the law," said Listya, head of Kerinci Seblat National Park, near Bengkulu, where the young Sumatran tiger came from.

There are only an estimated 150 Sumatran tigers remaining in Kerinci Seblat park, which is the largest wildlife conservation area in the giant island of Sumatra.

Conservationists, while praising Bengkulu police for arresting Kanel, fear that the case against him will be dropped because of political pressure.

Bengkulu is a stronghold of the Golkar party part of the coalition government led by President Megawati Sukarnoputri and her Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP).

"We are prepared to take a class action suit in this case if the investigation is stopped," said Listya, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

Kanel's case is seen as litmus test for whether the government is serious about cracking down on a rampant illegal trade in endangered species, such as Sumatran tigers.

"It's wonderful that the police are getting serious about the problem of rouge politicians and civil servants who trade in tigers," said Debbie Martyr, a member of the Fauna and Flora International conservation group.