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Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

2023 Issue 3 — 9 February 2023

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A. Marine and Fisheries

[Critics allege EU's "toxic collusion" with fishing lobbies is damaging Indian Ocean tuna stocks](#)

—Malavika Vyawahare, *Mongabay*, 7 February 2023

Despite opposition from the European Union members, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) agreed to reduce the use of drifting fish aggregation devices (FADs), but EU industrial fishing vessels dominate Indian Ocean tuna fisheries, including yellowfin, a stock now perilously close to collapse. Through their influence in EU delegations, industrial fishing lobbyists have blocked efforts to impose catch quotas and limit destructive fishing gear use by EU vessels, sending more lobbyists than officials to high-level tuna talks in recent years. The dominant role played by EU lobbyists is a sign of "toxic collusion" indicative of a deeper rot in the bloc's handling of fisheries resources in the region where many coastal countries are former colonies of EU member states, according to a report by a French NGO. Indian Ocean coastal countries take much smaller harvests. Indonesia, with a population four times larger than France, took less than 16% of the Indian Ocean catch, most of which was taken by artisanal fisheries, while EU industrial fleets account for about 33%.

Report: Bloom Association, [The E.U. under the rule of tuna lobbies](#), January 2023.

[Indian Ocean Tuna Commission adopts new rules](#)

—Wanjohi Kakakuru, *AP* via *The Washington Post*, 6 February 2023

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) states agreed to temporarily halt the use of industrial fishing gear that is drastically depleting tuna stocks in a win for coastal countries that rely on smaller-scale fishing methods. The decision came after days of turbulent negotiations at the IOTC meeting in Mombasa, Kenya, where coastal developing countries were at odds with the European Union states whose fishers rely on large purse seine and long-line fishing vessels. The resolution "may finally give room to yellowfin and bigeye tuna to rebuild", said Frédéric Le Manach, Scientific Director of Bloom. The new rules were nearly thwarted over the weekend when Kenya's fisheries minister pulled support for the proposal, but 11 other states led by Indonesia pushed the resolution through. The EU has previously been accused of "colonial tendencies" in the Indian Ocean and subsidizing their fishing industry through unfair quotas and opaque fisheries. More than 200,000 metric tons of fish are caught annually in the Indian Ocean by its member states.

[Australia is testing unmanned monitoring vessels for IUU surveillance in its EEZ](#)

—Bhavana Scalia-Bruce, *SeafoodSource*, 8 February 2023

The Australian government is testing solar-, wind- and wave-powered unmanned vessels capable of long-distance marine patrols off the west coast of Australia. The vessels, known as Bluebottles, were developed by Ocius Technologies to provide 24/7 ocean surveillance around remote islands searching for foreign vessels engaged in illegal fishing. The unmanned vessels also provide surveillance capabilities in naval reconnaissance and patrolling, and will be used to monitor activity in the national park zones of Australian marine parks where fishing is prohibited, Parks Australia said. The move comes amid an increase in illegal fishing in Australia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Last November, eight crew members aboard two Indonesian vessels were convicted of fishing illegally in Australia's domestic waters off the north coast of Western Australia and were each fined US\$16,844, according to a government press release.

[An El Niño climate pattern is forecast for 2023. How many coral reefs will bleach this time?](#)

—Elizabeth Claire Alberts, *Mongabay*, 2 February 2023

Elevated temperatures fuelled by El Niño climate patterns harmed three-quarters of the world's reefs in both hemispheres in 2015-2016, forcing corals to release their life-sustaining zooxanthellae and turning them ghostly white in a process known as coral bleaching. About 30% of the world's corals died as a result, while others have yet to fully recover. There is a 50-90% probability of another El Niño later this year. This could temporarily raise global temperatures to more than 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels, triggering multiple climate tipping points while disrupting marine food chains and fisheries in many parts of the world. However, this doesn't mean all corals in affected areas would die. Well-managed reefs, such

as those safeguarded in networks of marine protected areas (MPAs) may be able to recover more quickly from bleaching events.

Paper: Lijing Cheng, "[Another year of record heat for the oceans](#)", *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, 11 January 2023.

[Indonesia opens its 'ocean account' for sustainable marine management](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 30 January 2023

The Indonesian government is designing a new scheme to measure the long-term benefits provided by marine and coastal ecosystems. The ocean accounting mechanism will serve as the standard indicator in policy-making and zoning regarding Indonesia's fisheries, conservation areas, and marine essential ecosystems such as seagrass meadows, mangrove forests, and coral reefs. The account will be designed to show the importance of a marine resource and how much economic and environmental cost would be incurred if the resource were converted for commercial use, Hendra Yusran Siry, Secretary of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) zoning office told *Mongabay*, adding that the KKP has been working in tandem with the national statistics agency (BPS), geospatial information agency (BIG), fiscal monetary agency (BKF) at the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Planning (Bappenas). The mechanism will also be used to assess every two years any degradation to a marine area used for any commercial activity, such as tourism or resource exploitation.

B. Forests and Land Use

[Ministry aims for coastal reforestation in North Sumatra](#)

—Apriadi Gunawan, *The Jakarta Post*, 5 February 2023

The Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) plans to designate coastal areas of North Sumatra for reforestation in order to reduce carbon emissions, develop the local economy, and maintain aquatic ecosystems. Indra Exploitasia, the ministry's Director of Biodiversity Conservation, said the province's coastal areas are appropriate for mangrove reforestation. On 2 February, the KLHK, Central Tapanuli Regency administration, and the gold mining company PT Agincourt Resources held an event to plant 30,000 mangrove seeds and 20,000 shellfish in a coastal area of Pandan District. Dasrul Chaniago, the ministry's Marine and Coastal Pollution and Damage Control director, said that according to the 2021 mangrove map, Indonesia has about 3.3 million ha of mangrove forest, home to 20% of the world's biodiversity. As of 2015, an estimated 40% of the country's [original] mangrove [area] had been degraded or lost. The government has mapped around 70,000 ha of the best restoration candidate areas across 300 villages in Sumatra and Kalimantan.

[Changing circumstances turn 'sustainable communities into deforestation drivers](#)

—Kimberly Brown, *Mongabay*, 1 February 2023

Subsistence communities associated with low environmental impact and small carbon footprints can become drivers of forest loss and degradation when external pressures, poverty, and demand for natural resources force them to intensify their forest activities to meet basic needs, according to a global study that examined cases in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In Indonesia, mangrove area decreased in Takalar, South Sulawesi due to the creation of shrimp ponds driven by local fishers changing their livelihoods to shrimp farming, because shrimp offered more stable prices and government credit and subsidies were available for farmers to expand shrimp farms. The forest loss reduced the area of mangroves for collecting firewood, house materials, and fish traps, exposing the communities to erosion and saltwater ingress while releasing the carbon stocks stored in the mangrove trees and soils. The shift in production made the communities more vulnerable because it put all their eggs in one basket, centralizing earnings in shrimp raising and removing the protective cover of the mangroves from climate changes.

Paper: Abdul Malik et al, "[Mangrove forest decline: consequences for livelihoods and environment in South Sulawesi](#)", *Regional Environmental Change* 17, 157-169 (2017).

[Indonesia and Malaysia assail new EU ban on 'dirty commodities' trade](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 31 January 2023

Indonesia and Malaysia, the world's biggest palm oil producing countries, have intensified criticism of European Union (EU) trade policies they deem as discriminatory toward palm oil, raising doubts about the two countries' commitments to combat deforestation. In December, the European Council (EC), Parliament, and Commission struck a preliminary deal to adopt the deforestation-free trade regulation proposed by the EC in 2021, stating that the regulation will create an "unfair level [of] playing field for the palm oil industry, particularly against [European-produced] rapeseed oil." Indonesian President Joko Widodo said the two Southeast Asian nations would work together and strengthen cooperation through the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries (CPOPC), an intergovernmental organization, to "fight discrimination against palm oil." Once adopted, the EU regulation will be the first in the world to ban products from supply chains tied to deforestation and forest degradation, legally produced or not. The EU is one of the largest markets for palm oil, importing 8 million tonnes of palm oil and products from non-EU countries in 2021.

[Ignoring disputes, sacrificing sustainability](#)

—Diny Pramita, *Tempo English*, 30 January 2023

Although land certification is important, prioritizing land restructuring and agrarian dispute settlement is more urgent, according to Dewi Kartika, Secretary-General of the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA). In 2022, there were 212 agrarian disputes in 34 provinces involving a total disputed area of about 1 million ha and impacting 346,000 families. "Not a single one of the approximately 100 agrarian disputes involving state-owned companies has been resolved," she said. In the forestry sector, 15 of the 20 conflicts were caused by activities of the forest concession business license (PBPH) holders in industrial forests (HTI). Last year, *Tempo* visited oil palm plantations owned by locals in Siak Regency, Riau, meeting with representatives of four farmer groups whose land is being taken over by Balai Kayang Mandiri (BKM), a company that supplies Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) to grow acacia. BKM claims to have land management rights for 108 hectares as part of their 2022 work plan, including areas where the local owners say they have been growing oil palm since 2007.

[Mangrove clearing on Sumatra coast sparks scrutiny of loophole](#)

—Teguh Suprayitno, *Mongabay*, 30 January 2023

A 100-ha expanse of mangrove trees in eastern Sumatra was cleared in 2022 to make way for an oil palm plantation, removing the forest shield that previously protected the shoreline near Sungai Sayang village in Jambi province's Sadu district. Now a high tidal surge has inundated a cemetery. Much of Jambi's forest area had already been cleared over the past half century to make way for oil palm and pulpwood plantations, but less than half of its 10,000 ha mangrove estate is in satisfactory condition. Local residents say small landowners' claims were packaged together, avoiding the need for environmental checks or permits required for a corporate concession. Residents said the village chief at the time corralled 30 landowners and collected the documents for their land, packaging their land deeds and issuing an authorization to sell the parcels to the owner of PT Erasakti Wira Forestama (EWF), an oil palm concession operator. "We cannot stop residents from selling their land," a spokesman for the district government said.

C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Areas

[Paying fishers to ease off sharks and rays is cost-effective conservation](#)

—Cassie Freund, *Mongabay*, 6 February 2023

More than one-third of elasmobranch (shark and ray) species are at risk of extinction due to overfishing. Indonesia is a hotspot of elasmobranch biodiversity and also one of the leading exporters of sharks and rays in the world, putting already critically-endangered species under great pressure. A study found that an investment of US\$71,408-\$235,927 at two sites in Indonesia could protect up to 18,500 hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna spp.*) and 2,140 wedgefishes (*Rhynchobatus spp.*) a year. The funds would go to paying fishers not to catch these animals, a form of payment for ecosystem services (PES). Elle Wibisono, an expert on fisheries and marine protected areas who was not involved in the study said in an email to Mongabay that the research “highlights the need for fishery managers and conservationists to truly understand the human/fisher perspective when instilling management systems.” In contrast to fins, nearly all interviewees reported they would stop landing hammerheads and wedgefishes if they were compensated for the lost income.

Paper: Hollie Booth et al, “[Designing locally-appropriate conservation incentives for small-scale fishers](#)”, *Biological Conservation* 277, January 2023.

[Sumatran tiger captured in Aceh after second attack on humans](#)

—Primo, *Agence France-Presse* via *The Jakarta Post*, 5 February 2023

A Sumatran tiger believed to have attacked and injured farmers in Aceh was captured on 4 February, following two separate tiger attacks in the same Sumatran town that left at least four people seriously injured. Officials said they have not yet determined whether all the attacks were carried out by the same tiger. The animal that was captured entered a trap inside a forest reserve in the town of Kluet Tengah. Sumatran tigers, which are targeted by poachers for their body parts, are considered critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with fewer than 400 believed to remain in the wild. The cats are also afflicted by increasing conflict with humans, while rampant deforestation has reduced their natural habitat. The tiger, which had wounds inflicted by one of the victims during one attack, will undergo medical treatment before being released into a nearby national park once it recovers from its injuries, Agus Rianto, head of the Aceh conservation agency said.

[Captive-bred Javan hawk-eagles released in West Java](#)

—Theresia Sufa, *The Jakarta Post*, 1 February 2023

Two captive-bred Javan hawk-eagles (*Nisaetus bertelsi*), a female and a male, were released into the wild at the foot of Mount Gede Pangrango in West Java on 30 January. Jansen Manansang, Director of Taman Sari Indonesia (TSI), said the release was part of a captive breeding program by the Javan Hawk-Eagle Conservation Center (PSSEJ), and TSI, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), the Mount Halimun Salak National Park (TNGHS), the Natural Resource Conservation Center, and the mining company PT Smelting. TNGHS chief Wasja said hawk eagles are an endemic species of Java and that the raptors play an important role in the island’s ecosystem. The species, which is the inspiration for Indonesia’s national symbol, the Garuda, is threatened by illegal poaching, deforestation, and habitat loss. The captive breeding program was started in 2018.

D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

[New restrictions on rooftop solar panels could slow renewable energy transition](#)

—Retno Sulistyowati, *Tempo English*, 6 February 2023

The Indonesian government encourages rooftop solar power generation (PLTS), but proposed revisions in the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (MEMR) Regulation No. 26/2021 will eliminate net-metering or export-import of electricity from rooftop PLTS to the state-owned electricity monopoly PLN’s network, putting in place quotas to limit the installation of rooftop solar panels. Net-metering allows people who install rooftop PLTS to sell the excess electricity they generate to PLN. Fabby Tumiwa, Chair of the Indonesian Solar Energy Association (AESI) has proposed that the existing net-metering system be retained for household, social, and small-to-medium industrial customers of PLN. However, Dadan Kusdiana, Director-General of New, Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation at MEMR said rooftop

solar PLTS must return to their original purpose, not selling electricity to PLN. Dadan said the revised regulations on rooftop PLTS had been drawn up in a fair manner. “As long as the quota is still available, applications [to install] new rooftop PLTS will be approved as long as they fulfill the requirements,” he promised.

[Opinion: The government has no vision for developing clean energy](#)

— *Tempo English*, 6 February 2023

The government is ending incentives for rooftop solar panels. Under the scheme, excess electricity from rooftop PLTS ‘exported’ to PLN could be used to offset electricity bills paid to the state electric power monopoly, with the aim of encouraging growth in rooftop PLTS in the industrial and household sectors. Under the proposed revised regulations, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (MEMR) will end payments for the export of electricity from PLTS to PLN. Now many customers are being held hostage because solar panels they have installed cannot be used. PLN is refusing to purchase excess electricity from rooftop PLTS, motivated entirely to safeguard the interests of private suppliers of electricity to PLN, most of which rely on fossil energy. Further, quotas for rooftop PLTS permits will be allocated per region in line with PLN’s requirements. To end the dependency on PLN, it is time for customers to look at battery-based hybrid PLTS systems which do not need to be connected to PLN’s network.

[Despite billions to get off coal, why is Indonesia still building new coal plants?](#)

—Julia Simon, *NPR*, 5 February 2023

The Indonesian government is building a 16,200 ha “green industrial park” in Kalimantan which in theory would eventually run on solar and hydropower, but building the hydropower infrastructure could take years. In the meantime, Indonesia plans to build new coal-fired power plants to power this “green” park, raising questions about Indonesia’s status as a developing country receiving billions of dollars from industrialized countries to get off fossil fuels. In November 2022, leaders of the US, Japan, and other developed countries announced a US\$20 billion deal to help Indonesia get off coal power, which currently accounts for 60% of its electric power, intended to enable Indonesia to retire its excess coal plants with less economic pain, according to Rachmat Kaimuddin, Deputy Minister at the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investment. But Indonesian experts worry that despite Indonesia’s aspirations, the country has many coal-friendly policies, including the exemption allowing construction of more new coal plants if they are already in the pipeline or attached to strategic national projects like the green industrial park in Indonesian Borneo.

[Global energy transition poses challenges to East Natuna gas field development](#)

—Divya Karyza, *The Jakarta Post*, 2 February 2023

Analysts expect the global shift to renewable energy and technical problems to pose key challenges in the search for investors to develop oil and gas blocks in Natuna, Riau Islands province, one of the largest unexplored gas reserves in the world. The block is estimated to hold more than 200 trillion cubic feet (tcf), but with a high carbon dioxide content. The total proven reserves of natural gas are 36 tcf, far bigger than the Masela Block in the Arafura Sea (16 tcf) or the Indonesia Deepwater Development Block in the Makassar Strait (2.6 tcf). But considering the carbon dioxide content in excess of 60%, utilization of carbon capture would be critical and stakeholders would need to pay attention to promised carbon capture rates, according to Putra Adhiguna, an energy economist at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA). “The high CO₂ content means the investment window is closing fast, as global companies shift to renewable energy,” Adhiguna said.

[Indonesia to ban bauxite exports](#)

—Our Correspondent, *Asia Sentinel*, 1 February 2023

In a replay of its 2020 ban on nickel ore exports, the Indonesian government will impose a similar regulation on bauxite from June as part of a plan to encourage domestic bauxite processing and refining. President Joko Widodo has decreed that after decades of exploitation by multinationals, exports of raw materials will shrink while downstream production grows. The government wants to realize natural

resource sovereignty to improve job opportunities and fatten foreign exchange. Processed bauxite, refined into alumina, is worth eight times as much as raw ore. Bauxite ore reserves are estimated at 3.2 billion tonnes. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, there are only three operating smelters with a total input capacity of 4.56 million tonnes. However, the Association of Bauxite and Iron Ore Businesses (APB3I) is concerned that tens of millions of tonnes of bauxite production won't be absorbed if exports are prohibited. The investment required is very large, approaching US\$1.2 billion per smelter.

[Indonesian residents file climate case against Holcim in Swiss court](#)

—Emma Farge, *Reuters*, 1 February 2023

Several Indonesian residents have submitted a legal complaint to a Swiss court against the world's top cement producer, Holcim, which they say is doing "too little" to cut carbon emissions. The case was initiated in July 2022 by four residents of the island of Pari, part of Jakarta's Thousand Islands, which has been repeatedly flooded as global warming has driven up sea levels. NGOs backing the complaint, the first climate filing against a Swiss company, said they had singled out Holcim because the company is a major global source of carbon emissions and the largest so-called "carbon major" in Switzerland. A spokesperson for the Zug-based company, noting that climate change is a "top priority for Holcim at the heart of our strategy", stated that "We do not believe that court cases focused on single companies are an effective mechanism to tackle the global complexity of climate action." The company's website says it is committed to decarbonising the building industry and recently updated its climate targets.

[Cleaning up the Mandiodo Block](#)

—Linda Trianita, *Tempo English*, 30 January 2023

The police raided illegal nickel miners at the Mandiodo Block in North Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi. Eleven police cars entered the area, a concession of Aneka Tambang (Antam), a state-owned company that controls the block. There was a gaping hole from nickel excavation, but no mining activities were in sight. Antam had appointed Lawu Agung Mining (LAM), a nickel mining company that did not have a forest area utilization permit (IPPKH) which is required to undertake mining in a forest area. Over four years, the illegal nickel mined has a market value estimated at Rp 39 trillion (US\$2.62 billion). The majority of LAM's shares are owned by Windu Aji Sutanto, a businessman from Central Java who headed volunteers for Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin in the 2019 presidential elections. But Antam does not know how many partner contractors LAM has, nor do the partner contractors know the boundaries of Antam's concession area. Police said they have frequently taken action against illegal nickel mining, but in court the judges acquitted the suspects.

[Full metal jacket: Indonesia embraces resource nationalism](#)

—*The Economist*, 28 January 2023

After Indonesia banned exports of nickel ore in 2020, the value of nickel products exports rose to more than ten times the level in 2013. Nickel smelters have sprouted around the country, and the government is close to sealing deals with Tesla and BVC—the world's two largest makers of electric vehicles (EVs)—to build cars in Indonesia. Now the government is thinking beyond nickel. President Widodo confirmed that an export ban of bauxite, or aluminum ore, will come in June, and bans on exports of copper, tin, and gold ores are likely to follow. Indonesia's power in the global nickel market will be hard to replicate. Indonesia produces 37% of the world's nickel, but its bauxite, gold, and copper production is less than 5% of the world total. Indonesia lured new nickel smelters by promising an income tax holiday, discount on mining royalties, and exemption from VAT and export duties. The government claims eight aluminum smelters are under construction, all Chinese investments. Indonesia's resource nationalism risks falling afoul of global trade rules.

[Indonesia pushing for OPEC-style nickel cartel](#)

—James Guild, *Asia Times*, 26 January 2023

Indonesia Minister of Investment Bahlil Lahadalia suggested Indonesia could form an OPEC-style cartel for nickel and other inputs used in battery production. Nickel is a key input in the manufacture of lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles (EVs), and Indonesia has the world's largest nickel deposits. Indonesian officials, not content with low-value activities of extracting and exporting raw commodities, seek more value-added during processing and manufacturing. The idea of an OPEC-style cartel reflects authorities' desire to leverage control over the highly-sought commodity. But a global cartel of nickel-producing countries would be complex, difficult to organize, and could be undercut at any time by a single member or simply by the vagaries of the market. Canada, a major producer, has already indicated it is unlikely to participate. Lahadalia is sending a message that Indonesia is not afraid to intervene in markets when it is in its national interest, but trying to cartelize the global supply of nickel could turn into a case of taking a good hand and overplaying it.

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E. Pollution and Waste

[Pollution and climate change set the stage for rising antimicrobial resistance \(AMR\)](#)

—John Cannon, *Mongabay*, 8 February 2023

Pollution from a variety of sources is driving up resistance to the medicines used to treat infections, according to a report by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Antimicrobial compounds are used to treat bacterial, viral, fungal, and parasitic infections, saving countless lives, but the use and overuse of antimicrobials are influencing the evolution of the microbial organisms themselves, making them more resistant to these medications. The presence of environmental pollutants, such as heavy metals like zinc, as well as a warming climate can prime the development of resistance to important antimicrobials. This could lead to an additional 10 million deaths by mid-century, as many as died of cancer globally in 2020. Halting the rise of AMR will require improved sanitation and wastewater treatment, enhancing the ability to contain the release of antimicrobials, resistant microbes, and other pollutants, and limiting use of these chemicals in agriculture when they're not necessary. Cleaning up once the environment and soil have been contaminated with antimicrobials can be very expensive, experts say.

Report: UNEP, [Bracing for Superbugs: Strengthening environmental action in the One Health response to antimicrobial resistance](#), United Nations Environment Programme, 7 February 2023.

F. Investment and Finance

[Beware the risks of foreign capital in the renewable energy sector](#)

—Hiu Dilangit Sasongkojati, *The Jakarta Post*, 3 February 2023

The need for foreign capital in renewable energy investment comes with risks that developing economies like Indonesia should not overlook. In January, labor protests in Morowali, Central Sulawesi related to ferronickel operations of China-backed PT Gunbuster Nickel Industri (GNI) resulted in violence and the deaths of three workers. The protests were prompted by workers' demands for safer working conditions and higher wages and criticism of the discrepancy in privileges between foreign and local workers. But the larger theme is the centrality of welfare with capital as the currency. This—the desire to detach from spiking fossil fuel costs and gain demonstrable benefits—is the reason developing countries are willing to bear the costs of adapting to the demands of those with the technology to develop the renewable energy industry. China's condition of employing its own workers, tax holidays, and in Morowali, a monopsony in which China unilaterally determines the content of the minerals it mines and the price it is willing to pay for them.

[Weakened fight against corruption in Indonesia could deter longer-term investment](#)

—Dio Suhenda, *The Jakarta Post*, 2 February 2023

President Joko Widodo's economy-forward approach to development has left the country's fight against corruption in tatters, critics say. Indonesia's score on Transparency International's latest Corruption Perception Index (CPI) fell to 34, one of the worst year-on-year performances in the region. The country now ranks 110th of 180 countries surveyed behind Singapore, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, and Thailand. A Transparency International Indonesia (TII) researcher flagged the Political Risk Service index as indicating that graft, bribery, illicit kickbacks, and conflicts of interest among decision-makers were increasingly prevalent. One worrying trend is policymakers' tendency to manipulate legislation for their own benefit, a technique that had become more common since Widodo assumed office in 2014, including the recent government regulation in lieu of law (*Perppu*) on job creation, which sought to resuscitate the controversial Job Creation Law declared unconstitutional last year. Economist Faisal Basri said this policy climate would only attract "low-quality" investment, as the high political risk would deter many would-be investors, especially for the longer term.

G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

[YLLI launches marine and coastal sustainability training in Talaud for youth and women's groups](#)

—News Desk, *The Jakarta Post*, 31 January 2023

The Indonesia Sustainable Oceans Foundation (YLLI) has signed an agreement with the Talaud Regency administration in North Sulawesi to provide youth and women's organizations with training workshops on sustainability projects to improve the lives of local residents while contributing to climate mitigation efforts. Elshinta Suyosa-Marsden, who founded the YLLI in 1994, said the projects would cover 18 sub-districts in Talaud, supplementing other empowerment projects already outlined in the regency's development plans. Talaud Regent Ely Lasut said the project would be crucial to maintaining sustainable coastal management in a regency with small outlying islands that are vulnerable to climate change. In the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, YLLI raised funds to support the livelihoods of local fishers through the Hukum Adam Laut Panglima Laot Initiative, which operated a census for local fisher communities and registered fishing boats.

[Indonesia finally comes clean on its chronic abuses](#)

—John McBeth, *Asia Times*, 25 January 2023

After ignoring human rights abuses for most of his tenure, President Joko Widodo expressed regret for 12 gross violations dating back to the 1965-66 massacre of an estimated 500,000 alleged Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) members and supporters. Credit for the breakthrough goes to Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Mahfud MD, a former Minister of Defense and Constitutional Court justice. Mahfud decided on the approach after his efforts to create a truth and reconciliation commission ran into insuperable constitutional obstacles. Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) chairman Marzuki Darusman described the move as a "half-step", explaining that the government still needs to decide whether there will be a judicial or non-judicial resolution of the cases. Human Rights Watch (HRW) senior researcher Andreas Harsono called it "too little, too late" and said if it was to mean anything it would have to be followed by a process of accountability. The list of abuses also included the Petrus Killings, a wave of extrajudicial executions between 1983-85 that claimed up to 10,000 lives.

I. Indonesia and China in the South China Sea

[Indonesia's New Aggressiveness in the South China Sea](#)

—Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, *Asia Sentinel*, 8 February 2023

As Indonesia's President Joko Widodo takes over as 2023 chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) with an ambitious agenda, he is also pushing back against China's so-called "nine-dashed line" claiming hegemony over almost the entire South China Sea. Indonesia plans to auction off a giant gas field located in the East Natuna Block, after having just negotiated its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) maritime boundary with Vietnam and approved development of natural gas resources in the Tuna

Block, another maritime area Beijing claims. In 2017, the Indonesian government added Riau Province to the northern EEZ of the Natuna Islands, sparking objections from Beijing even though the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague ruled in 2016 that China's "nine-dashed-line" claims are invalid under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

[Sharing South China Sea resources better than the alternative during the energy crisis](#)

—Suryaputra Wijaksana, *ChannelNewsAsia*, 7 February 2023

In January the Indonesian government approved natural gas exploration in the Tuna gas block, one of the largest untapped gas deposits in the world, capable of generating cumulative government revenues through 2035 of US\$1.24 billion and cementing Indonesia's position as a major gas producer. But the block sits squarely inside China's claimed "nine-dashed-line". China lodged an official protest with the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but Beijing has also employed an aggressive show of force on the water, sending coast guard and armed fishing vessels to the exploration area to intimidate, similar to the way China deployed naval and maritime militia vessels last year to impede Malaysia's oil exploration in its exclusive economic zone and to prevent Philippine troops from reaching their garrison in the Philippines-occupied Thomas Shoal. Chinese aggression is pushing the Philippines and Vietnam closer to the US, while Vietnam and Indonesia's recently concluded maritime delimitation talks may forge a path for other Asean member states to unite over South China Sea negotiations.

[China's put-upon maritime neighbors in the South China Sea are pushing back](#)

—Banyan, *The Economist*, 4 February 2023

The South China Sea is larger than the Mediterranean, possessing valuable fish stocks and untapped oil and gas reserves. While all seven nations bordering the sea maintain overlapping rights, one of them, China, claims nearly the entire maritime expanse. Based on its unfounded "nine-dashed-line", China has turned remote reefs into airstrips and bases, used navy, coastguard and armed fishing fleets to intimidate its Southeast Asian neighbors, forcibly curtailing their fishing and exploration for hydrocarbons. China now wants to cajole the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) into a "Code of Conduct that would grant China the right to veto whatever naval exercises or oil and gas projects Asean members might wish to conduct in the sea with outside powers. However, Southeast Asian countries are using international law to push back. Particularly significant was the recent bilateral agreement between Indonesia and Vietnam to demarcate their exclusive economic zones (EEZs). None of the Southeast Asian states wants to provoke China openly, but a spirit of resistance is a growing feature of their response.

II. Politics and dynasties

[Dynastic politics takes deeper root in Indonesia](#)

—John McBeth, *AsiaTimes*, 6 February 2023

Joko Widodo rode to electoral victory in 2015 on the strength of his common-man image, the first of Indonesia's eight presidents to come from the heartlands of Java instead of Jakarta's civilian and military elites, but now Widodo risks losing that iconic status by trying to engineer a dynasty through two of his three sons: Solo mayor Gibran Rakabuming, 35, who holds the post that launched his father's political career; and his younger brother Kaesang Pangarep, 28, who is being groomed to replace him. Widodo's Sumatran son-in-law, Muhammad Bobby Nasution, 31, is mayor of the northern Sumatran capital of Medan, the country's fourth biggest city, while Rakabuming has his eyes set on the governorship of Central Java, the second most populous province, which the charismatic incumbent Ganjar Pranowo will vacate when he makes his expected run to succeed Widodo as president next year. Dynasties are not unknown in Indonesia—look no further than Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the founding president Sukarno, who retains an iron grip on the PDI-P party.

III. The return of tourists to Indonesia

Pandemic to paradise: First wave of Chinese tourists return to Bali after three years

—AFP via *France 24*, 2 February 2023

With the Lunar New Year and China's reopening to the world last month, the world's biggest spending tourists are back. Chinese holidaymakers endured three years of lockdowns and travel restrictions driven by Beijing's pursuit of its "zero Covid" policy, followed by a sudden reopening and accompanying spike in infections. Now a lucky few armed with selfie-sticks and straw hats are on long-awaited getaways to the "Island of the Gods." Chinese visitor numbers plunged after both countries closed their borders at the height of the pandemic. The Ministry of Tourism says the government is aiming for a massive rebound, estimating Indonesia would welcome 253,000 Chinese tourists this year. Balinese officials are even more bullish, hoping for a return of two-thirds of the 1.2 million Chinese visitors who came to the island pre-pandemic, making them the second biggest group after Australians. Although only several hundred Chinese tourists have arrived so far on a once-weekly flight from Shenzhen, the government says four more airlines have applied to fly regularly to Bali from China.

Bali to limit tourist access to mountain areas

—Ni Komang Erviani, *The Jakarta Post*, 6 February 2023

The Bali Province government plans to issue a regulation to limit tourist access to mountains to restore their sacredness. "People should not [be allowed to] freely enter [mountain] areas or make tourism destinations on the summits," Governor Wayan Koster said in a meeting with lawmakers on spatial planning on the predominantly Hindu island. "Many people ride motorbikes onto the summits, which I think is too much." The ban on tourism activities in the mountains had been recommended by some of Bali's highest religious leaders, he added. In 2022, Canadian actor Jeffrey Craig posted a video of himself performing a ceremonial Maori dance naked on the top of Mount Batur, triggering anger from local villagers and forcing them to hold special purification rituals. In 2021, a three-minute video showed a Russian couple having sex on top of Mount Batur, prompting similar responses from locals. "How much profit is there that we should sacrifice this sacred area?", Koster asked. "The mountain should be kept sacred. We have been degrading it."