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The corona-virus crisis in Indonesia

Vaccine Opportunists

—Devy Ernis, Tempo.co, 21 February 2021

Indonesia rolled out its first-phase vaccination program for health workers on 14 January, with 1.468 million health care professionals prioritized for vaccination based on risk and potential impacts of transmission, with the elderly and public service employees next on the priority list. But some government officials, desk workers, socialites, bureaucrats, and family members of regional heads have already been vaccinated, including some Jakarta Regional Representative Council (DPRD) members. Vaccination leaks to persons not working in the health sector in Jakarta were estimated at 5%. Vaccination leakages have also occurred elsewhere. Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin admitted leaks had occurred, noting that the vaccine had been distributed to 34 provinces, 512 regencies/cities, and 10,000 *puskesmas* [public health clinics], but said the program would remain focused on vaccinating priority groups. The ministry launched its second round of vaccinations targeting 21.5 million persons aged over 59 and 16.9 million public service employees at the end of February.

Interview: Minister of Health: What's important is that vaccines are no longer for sale

—Tempo.co, 21 February 2021

"I don't condone leaks," Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said, "but the vaccine must be given to many people. Rather than focusing on leaks, we would rather take care of health workers. If all health workers have been vaccinated, then the goal has been reached. What's important is that [the vaccines] are no longer for sale." Minister Budi said that 3 million doses of vaccine had been distributed and a WhatsApp Group had been created for *puskesmas* [public health clinics] and government health offices. "We were late [in starting] the second stage, but that has been resolved. We are competing with other countries to obtain vaccines. The private sector can be quicker, but we have to remember that vaccination is the right of all people. We cannot turn it into a business or let the wealthy get vaccinated more quickly than the poor. The stages must be [implemented] according to risk levels, starting with health workers as the most vulnerable, and the elderly after that."

Sputnik's Letter

—Raymundus Rikang, [Tempo.co](#), 22 February 2021

At a private meeting at the state palace after being vaccinated on 13 January, President Joko Widodo complained to Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin) Chairman Rosan Perkasa Roeslani that the vaccination target schedule would take too long. “I then proposed independent vaccination programs,” said Rosan, who is also Deputy Chair of the Covid-19 Mitigation and National Economic Restoration Task Force. Jokowi subsequently explained that independent vaccination programs were needed to accelerate immunization of the public. “Especially if the cost is borne by companies, why not?” he asked. Coordinating Minister for the Economy agreed to go along with the independent vaccination plan provided that employees would not have to pay for vaccinations and that the schedule for independent vaccinations wait until priority groups have been vaccinated. Airlangga also requested that businesses purchase different brands of vaccine than those used for the public vaccination program and use different distribution channels. However, some businesses have objected to having to provide free vaccinations to employees to participate in the independent program.

Opinion: Problems in the vaccine program

—[Tempo.co](#), 22 February 2021

The Indonesian government has obtained 28 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine from China, only a fraction of the 426 million doses required to ensure that at least 181 million people each receive two injections. Although there are commitments from four other vaccine suppliers, it is possible that the supply of vaccines will fall behind schedule. After health care workers, the next priority groups are the elderly and public service workers, including members of the military and national police, and other public sector employees. Next are those vulnerable for geospatial, social or economic reasons, and the final category is all other citizens. The independent program for private sector companies to provide vaccines for their own employees and their families is seen as a way to speed up herd immunization and the economic recovery, but there has been a vaccination leakage rate of 5%. Rather than treating each phase of the vaccination as a political celebration, public officials should concentrate on finding solutions to these problems.

Corruption and inattention mar Covid-19 programs for Indonesia’s disabled

—Dinas Permadi et al, *Asia Sentinel*, 26 February 2021

The disabled in Indonesia have been hit hardest and are most vulnerable to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many disabled people have lost their occupations. In many institutions, 20-30 people with disabilities are living in a single room, according to Yeni Rosa Damayanti, Chair of the Indonesian Mental Health Association. “Social distancing in an unattainable goal,” Damayanti said. The government has disbursed Rp 22 trillion (US\$1.54 billion) in social assistance programs, but there has been disappointment after the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) found that billions of rupiah of social assistance for people with disabilities had been siphoned off by government employees and by politicians from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). The Ministry of Social Affairs has discovered irregularities in the dispersal of social assistance funds, and sufferers of mental illnesses have had their medications and food allowances reduced or cut off due to corruption and other problems. This has implications for views of the public towards the government, which seems not to care about people with disabilities.

Marine & Fisheries

How new technology is helping to identify human rights abuses in the seafood industry

—Virginia Gewi, *The Counter*, 25 February 2021

The International Labor Organization estimates that there are 40 million victims of modern slavery around the world, of which 25 million are subject to forced labor. Globally, capture fishing employs 27 million people, primarily from developing countries. Using forced labor allows vessels to cheaply venture farther out to sea to access profitable fisheries, since many coastal fish stocks have already been depleted by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Indonesia is an important source of cheap migrant labor for fishing fleets from China, South Korea, and Taiwan. Reports of verbal abuse, debt manipulation, underpayment, and atrocious living conditions, sometimes physical abuse are common. Sadly, there is a synergy to preventing both overfishing and human rights violations, while fishing violations can be an indicator of human rights violation. A growing cadre of

tech companies and non-governmental organizations are playing a central role in using their expertise to identify vessels in the so-called dark fleet that do not broadcast their location or appear in public monitoring systems.

[Interview: New Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries — “I can’t be bribed!”](#)

—[Tempo.co](#), 1 March 2021

Since his appointment as Minister, Sakti Wahyu Trenggono has annulled three regulations on lobster larvae export and the use of trawl gear issued by his predecessor, Edhy Prabowo, after his surprise arrest in the lobster larvae export corruption case last November. Now Trenggono is drafting a new regulation to replace *cantrang* trawl nets with environmentally friendly fishing gear. The new minister explained that lobster larvae are a national resource that should be cultivated locally until they reach consumable size. “The other practice only enriched the buying countries. Lobster larvae export will never be allowed again.” Trenggono said there is no difference between the reinstated trawl ban and the previous ban issued by former minister Susi Pudjiastuti. “Trawl is banned—that’s it. They have to switch to more environment-friendly nets.” In replacing gear, we will help traditional fishermen who use small 5-GT boats. We don’t help the big fishers or their investors. They are rich and should not seek government help to replace their trawl gear.

Forestry & Land Use

[Government retains plantation size limit for oil palm, increases limit for rubber](#)

—Bernadette Christina Munthe and Fathin Ungku, *Reuters*, 22 February 2021

The Indonesian government issued new regulations for plantations to facilitate implementation of the “omnibus” job creation law approved in 2020. Under the regulations, oil palm plantations will retain the same maximum size limit of 100,000 ha, but the maximum size for rubber plantations was increased from 20,000 ha to 23,000 ha. Cocoa and coffee plantation size limits were increased from 10,000 ha to 13,000 ha, but the limit for coconut plantation was reduced from 40,000 ha to 35,000 and sugarcane plantations will be capped at 125,000 ha, down from the previous limit of 150,000, and the size of tea plantations was reduced from 20,000 ha to 14,000. The size of tobacco plantations, previously unregulated, will be limited to 5,000 ha.

[‘We attack,’ Indonesia declares in joint bid with Malaysia to shield palm oil](#)

—[Hans Nicholas Jong](#), *Mongabay*, 2 March 2021

Palm oil giants Indonesia and Malaysia (which together account for 85% of world palm oil production) are teaming up to fight what they call a smear campaign targeted at the commodity. The European Union (EU) has refused to recognize oil palm-based biodiesel as a renewable fuel and plan to phase out its use as a biofuel by 2030. A European Commission’s resolution on the issue, adopted in 2019, prompted retaliatory trade measures by Indonesia and Malaysia, who accuse the EU of favouring its own vegetable oil producers. The two countries have lodged trade disputes on this basis with the World Trade Organization and seek to hire an advocacy firm to run a campaign in Europe to counter the criticisms and fight the introduction of tighter regulations. The prospect of a public relations war breaking out has dismayed environmental activists in Indonesia, who say the focus should remain on reforming the palm oil industry to make it more sustainable.

[Papua deforestation highlights eastward shift of forest clearing in Indonesia](#)

—[Hans Nicholas Jong](#), *Mongabay*, 1 March 2021

While the annual deforestation rate has been decreasing over the past decade nationally, 10 provinces - with 80% of Indonesia’s 88 million hectares of remaining forest cover- have seen their individual rates increasing. The NGOs behind a new report attribute the decline in the national deforestation rate to the fact that there’s virtually no forest left to clear in parts of Sumatra and Borneo. And with large tracts of land becoming increasingly scarce on those two islands, the same agribusiness companies that cleared the forests there are now eyeing the eastern islands of Indonesia, particularly the Papua region, home to nearly two-fifths of Indonesia’s remaining rainforest. Companies are clearing land for oil palm and pulpwood plantations and mines. Another key driver of the deforestation in Papua is infrastructure development, which the government claims is meant to connect remote villages and communities, but which really serve mines, plantations and logging concessions, the report shows.

[Jakarta floods again as governor dithers](#)

—A correspondent, *Asia Sentinel*, 2 March 2021

Political problems are delaying relief from Jakarta's annual floods which have killed five people and forced thousands to flee. Governor Anies Baswedan says extreme rainfall exceeded the capacity of Jakarta's drainage system. Critics say Baswedan should have been able to do more to prevent flooding by "normalizing" the flow of the 13 rivers including the Ciliwung. The rivers are narrowing because people build on their banks and fill them with trash, and because of silting. The government needs to move settlements, line more riverbanks with concrete, and dredge the silt. Anies was elected in part on promises he could solve Jakarta's flood problems by building infiltration wells, installing pumps, and controlling sedimentation downstream, but the governor has been unwilling to remove residents from the riverbanks, and he abandoned river "normalization" efforts shortly after taking office in 2017. Yayat Supriatna, an urban planning expert, said the Jakarta government needs to be more serious about preparing itself for floods now that extreme rainfall is predicted to continue due to global warming.

Energy, Climate Change, Mining & Pollution

[Indonesian police may probe coal mining companies over deforestation-linked floods](#)

—[Hans Nicholas Jong](#), *Mongabay*, 18 February 2021

The national police are considering investigating allegations that recent deadly flooding in South Kalimantan was exacerbated by environmental degradation linked to coal mining. Activists say widespread deforestation across the province for coal mines and oil palm plantations contributed to the disaster by compromising ability of land in the catchment area to absorb runoff waters. The Ministry of the Environment and Forestry has denied this charge, but police say they may call in mining company executives for questioning. Police spokesman Rusdi Hartono said investigators had identified top executives of companies believed to be responsible for the environmental degradation in South Kalimantan. Activists have also criticized the government for issuing licenses allowing coal mining and other companies and others to clear vast swaths of rainforest in the region. Activists warn that the environmental destruction caused by companies operating in South Kalimantan could worsen under a slew of recently issued deregulation measures by the government which they say favour extractive businesses while side-lining environmental protection.

[Indonesia starts probe into illegal oil transfer by Iranian, Panamanian tankers](#)

—*Arab News*, 24 January 2021

Indonesian authorities on Thursday began an investigation into a series of violations by Iranian and Panamanian tankers seized on Sunday over suspected illegal oil transfer in the country's waters. The Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) impounded the two super tankers in waters bordering the South China Sea, off Pontianak, West Kalimantan province. The Panamanian-flagged MT Freya, managed by a Shanghai-based company, and Iranian-flagged MT Horse, were approached by the agency's patrol ship, which detected an idle signal indicating that the automatic identification system of the vessels was turned off. They were caught conducting a ship-to-ship fuel transfer from MT Horse to MT Freya, with hoses connected between them and oil spilling into the water. Bakamla said that the tankers seemed to have deliberately covered their hulls to conceal their identities. The two tankers are now anchored in the waters off the agency's base in Batam, Riau Islands province, near Singapore. Their crew members are under arrest but are allowed to remain on their respective vessels.

[Indonesia to remove royalty payments for using downstream coal](#)

—Bernadette Christina Munthe and Fathin Ungku, *Reuters*, 22 February 2021

Indonesia is cancelling royalty payments from some downstream purchasers of coal to boost its coal processing industries. The world's top exporter of thermal coal (coal burned for energy) wants to replace energy import costs by producing coal gas to replace liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). In the past, companies paid royalties to the government of 2% to 7% of the calorific value of the coal according to the value and whether the coal was mined from underground or open pit mines. Under a new regulation that took effect on 2 February, some coal processing activities will be eligible to pay royalties of 0%.

[Indonesia poised for EV riches but a nickel rush could hurt the environment](#)

—Jack Board, *Channel News Asia*, 28 Feb 2021

As American electric vehicle maker Tesla weighs a hefty investment in Indonesia, concerns are growing over the potential environmental consequences of a nickel mining rush. Indonesia has vast nickel ore resources. Macquarie Bank analysts estimate Indonesia could account for half the global supply of nickel and stainless steel within four years. The nickel opportunity is potentially worth more than the palm oil industry. Tesla CEO Elon Musk has called for increase in nickel mining, promising that Tesla would provide large-scale long-term contracts “if you can mine nickel efficiently and in an environmentally sensitive way.” But Musk’s call for sustainable nickel will be difficult to act on in the current Indonesian landscape, according to analysts. Nickel mining has a dirty track record in Indonesia, and the rush to extract and process more of it will add pressure to an industry that already suffers from opaque rules and regulations.

[Indonesia's mining giants race to adapt as investors cool on coal](#)

—Erwida Maulia, *Nikkei Asia*, 22 February 2021

Indonesia’s coal mining giants are piling into gasification projects as the country’s biggest export markets and global investors shift toward a more carbon neutral future. The moves dovetail with the government’s push to develop downstream processing of coal. The world’s largest exporter of thermal coal, Indonesia shipped 455 million tons to foreign coal buyers in 2019, equivalent to 31.7% of world thermal coal exports. State-owned Tambang Batubara Bukit Asam (PTBA) has partnered with state oil and gas company Pertamina on a US\$2 billion project to convert coal into dimethyl ether (DME). Commercial operations are targeted to start in 2025 with an annual production capacity of 1.4 million tons of DME. DME can be used as a replacement for propane in LPG and for diesel fuel in transport industry. Bumi Resources, Indonesia’s largest coal producer, will partner with Ithaca Resources and Air Products to build a coal-to-methanol facility in East Kalimantan. Air Products will invest US\$2 billion to build, own and operate the facility expected to go onstream in 2024.

[Indonesia, US discuss clean energy cooperation, climate change](#)

—Ade Irma Junida/Suharto, *Antara News*, 26 February 2021

Indonesia’s Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut Binsar Panjaitan held a videoconference meeting with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry to discuss clean energy and the challenge of climate change in advance of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) [scheduled for 1 November 2021]. The two leaders also discussed partnership to promote global ambitions and strategies for achieving national determined contributions (NDC) [to the Paris Accord] and efforts to handle the Covid-19 pandemic, a spokesperson said. Pandjaitan and Kerry agreed that both nations will not waste any time to launch a war on climate change and will work to develop a plan of bilateral cooperation to increase the scale and scope of climate ambitions. Coordinating Minister Luhut Pandjaitan also stated that he, along with the ministers of Environment and Forestry and Foreign Affairs, are ready to cooperate with Kerry to strengthen the upcoming US-hosted summit of world leaders to address the issue of global warming to be held on April 22, 2021.

[What is needed to boost water supply resilience in Indonesia?](#)

—World Bank Group, [Publicnow.com](#), 26 February 2021

Indonesia’s nearly 400 local water utilities (PDAMs) have struggled to keep up with population growth, especially in urban areas. Local water systems lack resilience to natural and climate-related hazards. Indonesian cities are developing quickly, so deep groundwater aquifers are overexploited in most urban areas. This has caused land subsidence in cities such as Jakarta, Medan, and Bandung where floods now frequently disrupt access to clean drinking water and contribute to increased water disaster risk. With Indonesia’s urban population projected to continue to rise in the next two decades, demand for piped water services will also continue to surge, and the challenges facing PDAMs will only grow. Climate change impacts will further increase the frequency and severity of natural hazards in a country already highly exposed to risk. Water utilities must act now to ensure water security. To do so, it is necessary to enhance resilience through risk-based planning and engineering design while ensuring PDAMs are better prepared to respond rapidly in emergencies.

[Chevron Pacific Indonesia Reports Oil Spill at Dumai Facility](#)

—*Jakarta Globe*, 1 March 21

Chevron Pacific Indonesia said that an unknown quantity of oil was spilled at one of its facilities at Dumai Port in Riau. Sonitha Poernomo, Corporate Communications Manager, said the company is working to contain the spill and assess the damage to the surrounding area. An oil boom was installed to prevent further spread and the company is coordinating with Dumai city government. Afdal Syamsir, head of the Environment Control and Pollution office at Dumai's Environment Department said officers had been deployed to oversee handling of the oil spill to prevent further spread. The department will sit with a team from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to determine the need for further action, he said. Chevron Pacific uses the Dumai facility to transport oil and gas from the Rokan block, Indonesia's largest oil and gas interest that Chevron Pacific has owned and operated since 1971. Chevron Pacific's rights on the block will expire in August, to be taken over by state energy company Pertamina.

[Surabaya's waste reduction strategy](#)

—Dody Hidayat, [Tempo.co](#), 22 February 2021

Surabaya's government excels in waste management by involving city residents. The majority of Surabayans are environmentally conscious. They know that trash is not allowed to be burned or thrown into the river. The city produced 1,500-1,600 tons of waste every day, which is handled by the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Waste Processing Site (TPS3R). Separated organic waste is processed into compost fertilizer by mixing it with crushed leaves. The fertilizer is used in city parks and residents can pick it up for free by showing their identity cards. Recyclable plastic, cardboard, plastic and glass items are picked up by collectors. Non-organic waste which cannot be recycled is taken to a 37.4-ha final waste disposal site (TPA). 1,000 tons of rubbish a day is processed at Surabaya's Waste Power Plant (PLTSa) to produce 11 MW [hours] of electricity. In the future, the PLTSa will be able to use gasification technology. The TSS3R has made it possible for Surabaya to reduce the volume of household waste by up to 50%.

[From scavenger cooperatives to wholesale stores](#)

—Abdul Manan, [Tempo.co](#), 22 February 2021

The Pemulung Berdaya Cooperative in South Tangerang, Banten, collects plastic bottle waste, which is sold to the Namasindo Plas recycling factory in Bandung, West Java. The collective, which has 58 members, most of whom previously were scavengers, was started by Danone Indonesia. Namasindo Plas is a supplier of recycled plastic materials for Danone, which produces Aqua brand bottled. According to Karyanto Wibowo, Danone's Director of Sustainability, Namasindo Plas produced 12,000 tons of recycled plastic material per year. "We still don't use 100% recycled material, but we have produced packaging that is 100% recycled, Karyanto said. "Our target is that by 2025 at least 50% of our overall aggregate use of materials comes from recycling—now it is 10%." Coca Cola Indonesia is also moving to expand use of recycled materials for bottles and packaging. The program will support three technology start-ups to help manage waste in Makassar and Gowa Regency in South Sulawesi and the Gringgo app, an application that connects collectors with scavengers in Denpasar, Bali.

[Opinion: Unsustainable way to manage waste](#)

—[Tempo.co](#), 22 February 2021

Trash collected, transported and dumped at final disposal sites (TPAs) may appear to rid homes and the environment of waste, but the trash accumulating at TPAs is itself a source of disease, pollution, and can cause disasters. On 21 February 2005, 157 people were buried under a mountain of garbage from the Leuwigajah TPA in West Java. That date is now celebrated as National Waste Awareness Day. But 16 years later, the government has still not abandoned the primitive way of processing garbage by piling it up in the open. The Reduce, Reuse Recycle (3R) concept in Indonesia is little more than a slogan. Seven years after Law No. 18/2008 banned open dumping of unprocessed garbage went into effect, 33 open dumping TPAs are still in operation. The volume of trash at TPAs across Indonesia increases by 175,000 tons every day, according to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. Half of this is household waste. But not a single region still operating open dumping TPAs has been sanctioned.

[Waste Management Problem Solver](#)

—Dody Hidayat, [Tempo.co](#), 22 February 2021

In 2005, a "waste avalanche" killed 157 people after a pile of garbage 60 meters high and 200 meters collapsed, burying the villages of Pojik and Cilimus in Leuwigajah, Cimahi, West Java. This accident is now commemorated as

Indonesia's National Waste Awareness Day. The 10-ha Leuwigajah final disposal facility (TPA), built in the early 1980s, had no waste processing capacity. Open dumping TPAs have been illegal since 2013, but regional administrations do not receive sufficient policy, enforcement or funding support from the central government to do a better job of managing waste. Mohamad Bijaksana Junerosano, CEO of Waste4Change, said that gather-transport-dump waste disposal change to an inverted pyramid approach of reducing rubbish at its source. More than half of household rubbish is organic and can be turned into compost, while another 20 percent is inorganic trash that can be recycled "So only 30% is sent to the TPA," Junerosano said. Waste management can be a driver of economic growth.

Conservation & Protected Areas

[Only one of fifty-two pilot whales survives mass stranding in Indonesia](#)

—*Mongabay*, 24 February 2021

Just one of the 52 short-finned pilot whales that washed up on the shore of Indonesia's Madura Island last week survived, an official said. Volunteers and local authorities initially managed to save three whales, pushing them back out to sea, but the trio became stranded again at a different location, and two of them died, according to Permana Yudiarto, head of the marine resources agency on nearby Bali island. Researchers now are trying to figure out why the whales ended up on land, only the latest mass beaching incident in the country with the world's longest coastline. Results of the autopsies at Airlangga University in the provincial capital Surabaya will take about a month to come in, Permana said. Observers cited water pollution, extreme weather and shipping activity as among the possible causes of the stranding.

[Non-protected areas play key conservation role for Indonesia's Javan deer](#)

—*Basten Gokkon, Mongabay*, 20 February 2020

Much of the total population of Indonesia's Javan deer occurs outside protected areas, highlighting the role of such zones as wildlife refuges, according to a new study, in the *Journal for Nature Conservation* reporting records of the Javan deer (*Rusa timorensis*) in its native range on the islands of Java and Bali as well as further east from West Nusa Tenggara to Papua. The study said more than half of the native (77%) and introduced (59%) populations occurred inside protected areas such as national parks, reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries. The rest were found in production forests, pulpwood plantations, oil palm concessions, and logging areas. Those non-protected areas, which include land earmarked for plantations, need to be taken into consideration in conservation policy-making for the Javan deer, the researchers write. "Our study provides reliable information on places where conservation efforts must be prioritized, both inside and outside the protected area network, to safeguard one of the remaining Indonesian large deer," the authors write.

Paper: [Geographical analysis of the Javan deer distribution and priorities for landscape conservation](#)

['Presumed Extinct' bird rediscovered in Indonesia](#)

—*Olivia Rosane, Ecowatch*, Feb. 26, 2021

Last October Muhammad Rizky Fauzan and Muhammad Suranto captured a bird they had never seen before in South Kalimantan Province. After photographing and releasing the bird, they sent the photos to birdwatching organizations for identification. The bird was identified as the black-browed babbler (*Malacocincla perspicillata*), which had last been documented about 170 years ago. It is so rare that the data on the only collected specimen listed the bird as "presumed extinct." The bird was first described by Charles Lucien Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, in the 1840s. Ornithologist Panji Gusti Akbar detailed the find in a paper published in *Birding Asia*, noting that this is the longest that an Asian bird has been lost to science and then rediscovered. The researchers do not have sufficient information to determine the conservation status of the rediscovered species, but they hope to carry out further study, but Akbar noted massive deforestation in lowland Borneo suggests habitat loss poses a threat.

Paper: [Missing for 170 years—rediscovery of the Black-browed Babbler on Borneo](#)

[Rescued Orangutans Returned to Indonesia Amid COVID-19 Risk](#)

—Emily Denny, *EcoWatch*, 24 February 2021

With lockdowns in place and budgets slashed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many environmental protections vanished this past year, leaving some of the world's most vulnerable species and habitats at risk. But conservationists at the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation were faced with an entirely different threat. Their beloved orangutans share a strikingly similar DNA to humans, making them susceptible to respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19, Reuters reported. So when it came time to reintroduce a group of rescued orangutans back into the wild, conservationists had to rethink their usual transportation methods to prevent potentially spreading the virus. The solution? Reintroduce the critically endangered species via helicopter. Last week, ten orangutans returned to the wild by taking a flight to the Indonesian portion of Borneo Island, Reuters reported. Prior to their release, the orangutans were held in rehabilitation centers, according to Reuters. They included five males, a mother and two babies and two other females.

[Rimba Raya Biodiversity Reserve Collaborates to Restore Mangrove Forests in Seruyan](#)

—ACN Newswire, *Yahoo*, 1 March 2021

Rimba Raya Biodiversity Reserve, Tanjung Puting National Park and the Seruyan Regency Government in Central Kalimantan are collaborating with local communities to plant 30,000 mangrove (*Rhizophora sp*) seedlings at Tanjung Siamuk Beach, Sungai Udang Village, Seruyan Regency. The village was chosen because 80% of the people are fishers as well as fishpond farmers. Fishpond construction has contributed to mangrove forest destruction, Tanjung Puting National Park official Budi Suriansyah said. Involving the community in restoring mangrove ecosystems is especially important because it provides an opportunity to build awareness of the value of maintaining the balance of the natural environment, Budi explained. "Some people still look at this planting activity solely as a means of income," Agung Yulianto, Chair of Gerakan Masyarakat Bersatu Sungai Udang Village, said. "However, a side effect of this initiative is that it is helping to develop a sense of ownership and a desire to preserve the biodiversity in our homeland."

Other

[Uniforms for Diversity](#)

—*Tempo.co*, 1 March 2021

The joint ministerial decision by Ministers of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim, Home Affairs Tito Karnavian and Religious Affairs Yaqut Cholil Qoumas on uniforms and attributes worn by students at state elementary and middle schools underlines the government's resolve not to interfere in matters concerning students' religious beliefs. Therefore, the reaction by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) asking the government to give regional administrations authority to regulate school uniforms in line with students' religions would be a step backward. As state education institutions, public schools must not reflect on a particular religion. Uniforms based on religion will lead instead to a uniformity of culture and an end to the diversity that is characteristic of Indonesia. It is important to realize that school policies requiring students to wear uniforms based on religious teachings are a form of political intervention in students' bodies, particularly females. Whatever form it takes, this type of pressure must be rejected, and so must the banning of expressions of religious faith, such as the ban of wearing *jilbabs* (headscarves) in schools during the New Order regime [1966-1998]. Unfortunately, since the 1998 *reformasi* and the expansion of freedom of religious expression, the political pendulum has swung to the other extreme. Schools and regional governments in large numbers have passed rules obliging students to wear clothing identified with a particular religion as well as banning the use of symbols of minority religions in their regions. The obligation for non-Muslim female students at State Vocational School 2 in Padang, West Sumatra to wear *jilbabs* is only the tip of the iceberg. Previously, in regions such as Bali and Papua, there were reports about Muslim students who were forbidden to wear the *jilbab*. Both of these are discriminative rules that violate human rights and are at odds with the 1945 Constitution.

The End