



## Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

2023 Issue 7 — 4 April

The *Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest* is a biweekly collection of summaries of articles related to conservation, the environment, and sustainability in Indonesia that have appeared in print or online in local, regional, and global English-language media. We welcome comments, suggestions, and corrections. To learn more about us and to access previous editions of the News Digest, please visit our website at [www.starlingresources.com](http://www.starlingresources.com). If you would like to add colleagues or friends to our distribution list or unsubscribe, please contact us at [newsdigest@starlingresources.com](mailto:newsdigest@starlingresources.com).

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### A. Marine and Fisheries

**Seascape: the state of our ocean: [Lost homes, lost traditions, lost habitats: the cost of Indonesia's brand new city | Global development](#)**

—[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) and Richaldo Hariandja, *TheGuardian*, 1 April 2024

Residents in Balikpapan Bay, Borneo, doubt Nusantara's promise as a sustainable city, which is harmonious with nature. The colossal project aims to establish Indonesia's new capital, encompassing industrial zones, mines, Indigenous territories, and farms in a 2,560 sq km area. Jakarta's sinking spurred this relocation, accelerated by groundwater depletion,

unchecked development and climate change. Heavy rainfall and sea-level rise threaten Jakarta, prompting the move to East Kalimantan to decentralize power and wealth. While some anticipate economic benefits, others question the rushed and ambitious endeavor's environmental and social toll. Indigenous communities face displacement and loss of sacred sites, with inadequate compensation. The development encroaches on mangroves, endangering marine life and local livelihoods. Criticism extends to potential ecological damage and doubts about foreign investment. Despite promises of sustainability, concerns persist over the project's long-term impact on communities and the environment. Meanwhile, foreign investment for the development has been slow to arrive. The president said last year that the project had received a lot of interest from potential investors, but had yet to draw in foreign funding.

### [In Raja Ampat, pearl farming balances business and ecological sustainability](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 22 March 2024

In the heart of Indonesia's Raja Ampat, pearl farming thrives within a healthy marine ecosystem. Initially driven by wild oyster harvesting, the shift to cultured pearls has led to sustainability concerns. The farming includes the delicate process of implanting beads into oysters, a well-kept technique developed to accelerate pearl production. PT Arta Samudra, tracing back to Indonesia's first pearl farm in 1982, now pioneers hatchery-based production, reducing reliance on wild stocks. Pearl technicians like Joy Marthyn Sitompul emphasize the vital link between a healthy environment and pearl quality. Yet, challenges loom, from climate shifts affecting pearl production to threats like marine pollution. Despite export bans protecting the industry, wild oyster populations face pressure. Raja Ampat's pristine waters, part of the Coral Triangle and global biodiversity hotspot, demand conservation against destructive fishing and other unsustainable practices. Business and locals hope for global recognition of Raja Ampat's cultivated pearls, echoing the call for sustainable practices to safeguard both the industry and its marine habitat.

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## B. Forests and Land Use

### [State Losses IDR 271 Trillion, Where Did It Come From?](#)

—Willy Medi Christian Nababan, *Kompas*, 1 April 2024

A recent alleged corruption case surrounding tin mining at PT Timah Tbk from 2015-2022 resulted in a staggering state loss of US\$17 billion. Expert testimony revealed detailed breakdowns of the losses, encompassing ecological damages amounted to US\$9.9 billion, economic losses reached US\$3.7 billion, and recovery costs totaled US\$330 million. Additionally, losses outside the forest area accounted for about US\$3 billion. Many consider unscrupulous practices of tin "white gold" mining only enrich a handful of parties, whilst leaving behind environmental damage. The Indonesian Attorney General has indicted 16 suspects, including high profile businessmen Harvey Moeis and Helena Lim. The investigation utilized satellite imagery to monitor mining activities, revealing that many mines operated illegally in protected forest areas. The chain of suspects suggests a long-standing collaboration, with Moeis allegedly orchestrating illegal activities and instructing smelter owners to divert profits. These profits were then distributed among the suspects, including through CSR funds. The case underscores the detrimental impact of non-compliant mining practices on both the environment and the economy.

### [PalmWatch platform pushes for farm-to-fork traceability of palm oil](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 22 March 2024

PalmWatch, a new online and open-source tool, connects major consumers like Nestlé and Unilever to the impacts of their palm oil use. PalmWatch encourages transparency of the global supply chain, to better help consumers trace the impact of the commodity. The tool standardizes data from over 2,000 mills, filling gaps in supply chain disclosures. By linking mills to deforestation risk and past impacts, it empowers brands and activists to demand sustainable practices. Advocacy groups welcomed the launch of the tool, saying it allows for improved targeting of campaigns to get brands to push for more sustainable practices. Yet, it lacks data on traders and human rights abuses, planned for future updates. A key hurdle to transparency has long been the fact that batches of palm oil and their derivatives sourced by consumer brands potentially contain products from hundreds of mills processing palm fruit from thousands of plantations. By scraping various websites with mill disclosure data and standardizing the information in one place, PalmWatch can come up with a supply chain map that can link specific mills, suppliers and consumer brands associated with palm oil.

### [An 'anonymous' company secretly linked to an Indonesian billionaire is destroying Borneo's rainforests, environmentalists say](#)

—Scilla Alecci, *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, 19 March 2024

An Indonesian billionaire, Sukanto Tanoto, allegedly hides behind a complex corporate veil to exploit Borneo's rainforests through his company, PT Mayawana Persada, linked to the Royal Golden Eagle (RGE) conglomerate. Greenpeace reports extensive deforestation, endangering orangutans and indigenous communities. The conglomerate's zero-deforestation pledge clashes with its expanding pulpwood supply, facilitated by anonymous companies like Mayawana. RGE denies ties to Mayawana, rejecting accusations. However, investigations reveal RGE's history of using shell companies to evade transparency and taxes. The report exposes a broader trend of natural resource firms using hidden entities to conceal forest destruction, as seen in other cases like Paper Excellence and Asia Pulp and Paper. Despite environmental pledges, these companies allegedly exploit forests through opaque practices, casting doubts on certification programs' effectiveness. Efforts to disclose beneficial ownership in Indonesia face challenges, allowing such practices to persist. The report urges greater transparency to hold corporations accountable for environmental degradation.

### [Toilet paper: Environmentally impactful, but alternatives are rolling out](#)

—Petro Kotze, *Mongabay*, 15 March 2024

Toilet paper, a staple product with global demand, faces scrutiny for its environmental impact. While the use is ubiquitous in China, North America, parts of the EU and Australia, the environmental impact of the toilet paper is rarely discussed. Environmentalists recently began urging people to be more aware of the real price paid for each roll — especially for luxury soft, extra-absorbent TP made from virgin tree pulp. Sourcing from trees, mainly for virgin pulp prized for softness, contributes to deforestation, especially in regions like Indonesia's tropical rainforest, Canada's boreal forest and Brazil's eucalyptus plantations. Emissions from energy-intensive manufacturing further exacerbate footprints. Alternatives like recycled paper, bamboo, or innovative non-wood fibers offer greener options. However, challenges remain in transportation and sourcing sustainability. Bidets, reduced usage, and recycled options present eco-friendly alternatives. Industry giants like Kimberly-Clark pledge sustainability goals, while new technologies, like straw pulp production, promise lower footprints. Yet, transparency and awareness across the supply chain are crucial for real change, with deforestation now a significant concern in emerging markets.

Wang, X., et al. (2023). [Removal of toilet paper fibers from residential wastewater: A life cycle assessment](#). *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 30(35), 84254-84266.

Gemechu, E. D., Butnar, I., Gomà-Camps, J., Pons, A., & Castells, F. (2013). [A comparison of the GHG emissions caused by manufacturing tissue paper from virgin pulp or recycled waste paper](#). *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 18(8), 1618-1628.

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## C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area

### [Conservationists seek more proof that Javan tiger may no longer be extinct](#)

—Agencies, *TheJakartaPost*, 26 March 2024

Conservationists are hopeful about the potential rediscovery of the Javan tiger, extinct since the 1980s. A recent study suggests genetic links between a found hair and the species. Armed with camera traps and DNA sweeps, researchers aim to confirm its existence. The Environment and Forestry Ministry plans further research, including setting up camera traps and involving genetics experts. Despite similarities with Sumatran and Bengal tigers, distinct traits hint at the Javan tiger. However, caution is urged due to limited samples and the risk of alerting hunters. The Javan tiger's extinction resulted from poaching and human conflicts. Declared extinct by the IUCN, its rediscovery would prompt protection efforts. Currently, only the Sumatran tiger remains, critically endangered with fewer than 400 believed to exist. 122

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## D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

### [As El Nino bites, Indonesians struggle with record-high rice prices](#)

—Reuters, *TheJakartaPost*, 1 April 2024

Indonesia grapples with soaring rice prices due to El Nino-induced dry weather, leading to shortages. Despite government efforts offering discounted rice, demand remains high. Rice is ingrained in Indonesia's culture and diet, with per capita consumption surpassing other carbohydrates. High food inflation, driven by rice prices, led to political upheaval in the past. Severe weather conditions, exacerbated by El Nino, threaten agricultural livelihoods and food security. Rising rice prices and reduced availability can lead to food insecurity, particularly for low-income households. This can create feelings of hunger, anxiety, and frustration, increasing the risk of social unrest and protests, according to the International Rice Research Institute/IRRI. Farmers experiencing crop failures lose income and may face debt, further contributing to economic hardship and social instability. To mitigate shortages, Indonesia is set to import up to 5 million tonnes of rice in 2024 and promotes diversification of carbohydrate sources. Investments in irrigation, drought-resistant seeds, and technological solutions are advocated for long-term resilience. Farmers endure challenges with extreme weather, adapting crops to withstand drought, albeit at higher costs.

### [Dozens killed in extreme weather in Java](#)

—Nina Loasana, *TheJakartaPost*, 27 March 2024

Recent extreme weather events on Java Island have caused numerous fatalities and displacements, with landslides and floods wreaking havoc. In West Bandung, a landslide destroyed homes and left residents missing, hampering rescue efforts. In Bogor, floods and landslides claimed lives and submerged homes, prompting evacuations. Central Java's Demak and Kudus also faced significant flooding, with cloud seeding operations and repairs underway. The Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency BMKG predicts continued extreme weather, urging vigilance. Since January, Indonesia has endured 554 natural disasters, predominantly floods and extreme weather, affecting millions and claiming over 100

lives. Residents are warned to remain cautious as the rainy season persists, particularly in landslide-prone areas like Garut and Ciamis in West Java.

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## E. Pollution and Waste

### [Biomass-burning coal plants leave the air even dirtier, Java communities say](#)

—Rabul Sawal, *Mongabay*, 25 March 2024

In Tegal Taman village, Java, a thin layer of soot blankets people's settlement near PLTU 1 Indramayu coal power complex, operational since 2011. PLTU 1 Indramayu, a 13-year-old coal power plant, has begun adding biomass to the coal it burns on the north coast of West Java province. As a result, farmers have observed reduced yields, fishers face declining catches, and respiratory issues plague children. According to Indonesia's state electricity firm PLN, its 43 coal units nationwide consumed 1 million metric tons of biomass in 2023, a 71% increase over 2022. PLN seeks ways to reduce emissions through biomass co-firing but faces criticism. Although official reports downplay health impacts, research suggests biomass emissions worsen air quality, potentially causing premature deaths. Residents express anxiety about respiratory risks, with anecdotal evidence linking the coal plant to health problems. Amidst concerns, UNICEF estimates thousands of Indonesian children die annually from preventable respiratory infections. Surono describes the air pollution as akin to a struggling engine, highlighting the growing distress over deteriorating air quality in the area.

### [A New Chapter on the Dangers of Microplastics on Heart Health](#)

—Ahmad Arif, *Kompas*, 25 March 2024

Some new research highlights the peril of microplastics and nanoplastics, as they can accumulate in human arteries, potentially elevating the risk of heart attacks. Researchers at the Columbia and Rutgers Universities discovered 110,000 to 400,000 particles per liter in bottled drinking water, with particles smaller than one micron, suggesting widespread contamination. Another study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found a correlation between these plastics and heart disease, with patients harboring plastic in their arteries facing a 20% higher risk of heart attack, stroke, or death. They examined 257 individuals, detecting plastic in arterial plaque from 150 patients, mainly comprising polyethylene and polyvinyl chloride fragments. Those with plastic plaque showed increased inflammation, potentially destabilizing plaque and promoting blood clots, leading to cardiovascular events. Despite limitations in sample size and demographics, the study underscores the urgent need for further investigation and public awareness. Other scientists found plastic fragments in the lungs, liver, blood, placenta, and breast milk. Philip Landrigan, a health expert with Boston College, emphasized the significance of this pioneering report in linking microplastics to human disease, urging replication and broader studies.

Qian, N., Gao, X., Lang, X., Min, W., & Potma, E. O. (2024). [Rapid single-particle chemical imaging of nanoplastics by SRS microscopy](#). Edited by Eric O. Potma, University of California, Irvine, CA. PNAS.

Marfella, R., Prattichizzo, F., Sardu, C., Fulgenzi, G., Graciotti, L., Spadoni, T., ... Paolisso, G. (2024). [Microplastics and Nanoplastics in Atheromas and Cardiovascular Events](#). *New England Journal of Medicine*, VOL. 390 NO. 10

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## F. Investment and Finance

### [Hyundai ends Indonesia aluminium deal after climate campaign by K-pop fans](#)

—Reuters News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 3 April 2024

Hyundai terminated its aluminium deal with Adaro in Indonesia after pressure from climate activist group Kpop4Planet, which is also supported by K-pop fans worldwide. The South Korean automaker signed the MoU with energy group Adaro Minerals in 2022 to secure the right to purchase aluminium produced by Adaro's subsidiary PT Kalimantan Aluminium Industry. At the time of the signing, Hyundai said it expected to procure aluminium from Adaro that meets the automaker's carbon neutralization policy amid growing demand for aluminium among global automakers. Smelting aluminium requires huge amounts of energy and when using coal produces large volumes of carbon emissions. Adaro plans to power the third phase of its aluminium smelter project with a hydropower plant that the group is currently building. Kpop4Planet hailed the decision as a victory for climate awareness, vowing to monitor Hyundai's future sourcing practices.

### [Increasing biodiesel use may aggravate environmental risks](#)

—Divya Karyza, *TheJakartaPost*, 24 March 2024

The food-versus-fuel dilemma in Indonesia intensifies as palm oil consumption for biodiesel surpasses that for food. Last year, 46% of 23.2 million tonnes went to biodiesel, raising concerns about deforestation. The Energy Shift Institute warns of overlapping uses, subsidized by the government, potentially leading to environmental harm. While the Indonesian Biodiesel Producers Association APROBI didn't respond, the Palm Oil Association GAPKI supports increasing biodiesel usage up to 40%, urging sustainable practices. However, only 0.2% of plantations have sustainability certifications. Indonesian Oil Palm Farmers Association Apkasindo suggested the government to improve the productivity of smallholder palm oil plantations, which make up 42% of the country's total palm oil plantations. The government must make it easier for smallholder farmers to join the People's Oil Palm Replanting (PSR) program, which aims to boost productivity, but progress is slow. London-based nonprofit CDP predicts increased biodiesel demand may drive deforestation, which already is a major issue. Strict monitoring and transparent reporting are vital to prevent future crises.

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## **G. Human Rights and Gender Equality**

### [Komnas HAM opens probe into bones found at Aceh's Rumoh Geudong](#)

—News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 1 April 2024

The National Commission on Human Rights, or Komnas HAM, is investigating human bones discovered at a memorial park construction site in Aceh's Pidie regency. President Jokowi initiated the park construction to remember the victims of human rights violations, alleged to take place during a military operation against separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM), from 1989 to 1998, in what was then called Aceh military operation region (DOM). The bones, believed to be victims of extrajudicial killings by Indonesian military troops, were found near a former military base. Komnas HAM urges the government to secure the bones as potential evidence, conduct forensic tests, and ensure transparency for victims and their families. Construction at the site is called to halt temporarily to prevent the destruction of evidence. This probe sheds light on past atrocities committed during the conflict in Aceh. Jokowi visited the Rumoh Geudong in June 2023, after he acknowledged and apologized for 12 incidents of gross human rights violations committed by the government between 1965 and 2003 in a bid to make good on his campaign promises.

### [Students demand that non-organic troops be withdrawn from Papua](#)

—Dionisius Reynaldo Triwibowo, Kompas, 30 March 2024

Papuan students in Central Kalimantan protest alleged torture by authorities in Papua. The chair of the Papua Student Coordination Body, Fernando Mirip, regrets the unjust treatment of three students from Mangume, Amukia, Puncak Ilaga named Warinus Murib, Definus Kogoya, and Alius Murib. He also highlights the long-standing human rights violations in Papua that have occurred since 1963 when military operations were carried out until now and requests an end to the exploitation of Papua's natural resources. Specifically, the student body demand three asks, namely 1) withdrawal of non-organic TNI and Polri soldiers from all regions in Papua; 2) access for international journalists and the UN to monitor the situation in Papua; and 3) removal of the Cenderawasih Commander from his position and bring the perpetrators of the torture of Papuan civilians to court, to be tried in accordance with applicable laws.

### [Indonesian activists face jail over FB posts flagging damage to marine park](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 25 March 2024

Greenpeace condemns Indonesian authorities' legal actions against four environmental activists for protesting illegal shrimp farms damaging Karimunjawa National Park. Charged under a controversial 2008 law on online speech, which critics say has been abused vigorously by the Indonesian state to stifle dissent and opposition, they face silencing efforts by authorities, termed SLAPP measures or strategic lawsuits against public participation. Daniel Frits Maurits Tangkilisan, the main activist, faces a 10-month jail term and a fine for "hate speech". The activists highlight shrimp farm proliferation inside the marine park since 2016, causing ecosystem damage and freshwater crisis. Their case signifies broader challenges for environmental defenders in Indonesia, reflecting limited protection and legal constraints. Amnesty International documented numerous assaults on environmental activists, stressing the need for legal reforms to safeguard freedom of expression and environmental advocacy.

### [Indonesian military apologises after West Papuan man filmed being tortured in water-filled barrel](#)

—Ben Doherty, *TheGuardian*, 25 March 2024

Indonesian military apologizes for the torture of a Papuan man as filmed in a water-filled barrel, confirming 13 personnel have been detained. Major General Izak Pangemanan condemned the act, acknowledging it as a violation of the law and expressing regret. The incident, captured in two videos, occurred during a military raid in the Omukia and Gome districts. The executive president of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), Menase Tabuni, condemned the assaults on civilians and called for a UN investigation into human rights violations. Despite global condemnation, the exiled Papuan leader Benny Wenda said while the videos were extreme and shocking, they merely expose how Indonesia behaves every day in the country. He stated that such abuse is common due to the media ban. The region's complex politics involve ongoing allegations of severe human rights violations by Indonesian security forces. The situation in Papua is complicated further by politics in Jakarta. Defence minister Prabowo Subianto is now the president-elect. He was dismissed from the military in 1998 after claims his forces tortured political opponents of the dictator Suharto. He was also accused of human rights abuses in Timor Leste and Papua.

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## I. RI General Elections

### [KPU, Prabowo camp call on court to reject election suits](#)

—Nur Janti and Alifia Sekar, *TheJakartaPost*, 29 March 2024

The General Elections Commission (KPU) and Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka's camp urged the Constitutional Court to reject election suits filed by Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. Anies and Ganjar contested the KPU's election results, alleging fraud and state interference. KPU's lawyer dismissed the claims as baseless, defending the election's integrity. Prabowo's team argued the disputes were wrongly filed and should be handled by the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). Despite objections, the court has the authority to rule on the disputes and may order a revote or candidate disqualification. An amicus brief from 300 academics supports disqualifying the Prabowo-Gibran ticket. The hearing ended with plans to present witnesses, including cabinet ministers. The court is set to rule by April 22. In a separate development, the court's ethics council found Justice Anwar Usman guilty of an ethics violation in his role in the controversial ruling that paved the way for Gibran's candidacy.

### [Indonesia election: losing candidate files court challenge after Prabowo Subianto victory](#)

—News sourced from *Reuters*, *TheGuardian*, 21 March 2024

After Prabowo Subianto's landslide victory in Indonesia's election, losing candidate Anies Baswedan has filed a legal challenge at the constitutional court, citing numerous election issues. Anies refuses to concede, claiming unfair government influence and electoral irregularities, including alleged manipulation of social assistance distribution. The court's last-minute rule change allowing Prabowo's son as a running mate has also been criticized. The Anies team has complained about the widespread allocation of social assistance, such as rice, fertiliser and cash handouts, in key electoral areas, which they said influenced the vote. Indonesia's current administration has rejected these claims. Both camps allege widespread counting irregularities with Ganjar Pranowo's team also expected to lodge a legal challenge. Prabowo, expected to take office in October, thanked supporters and pledged inclusivity. Chinese President Xi Jinping and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken have extended congratulations to Prabowo.

## **II. Indonesia in Geopolitics**

### [Indonesia supports Palestine full UN membership](#)

—Yvette Tanamal, *TheJakartaPost*, 3 April 2024

Indonesia supports Palestine's UN full membership bid and actively lobbies other nations for support. The Foreign Ministry emphasizes Palestine's statehood recognition as a key foreign policy goal. Amid ongoing Gaza conflict, Palestine seeks full UN membership, backed by the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation/OIC, the Non-Aligned Movement/NAM, and the Arab League. Spain signals potential recognition of Palestinian statehood. Indonesia, a member of OIC and NAM, intensifies diplomatic efforts for Palestine, especially after recent conflicts. Following an hour-long discussion on Gaza with several envoys from 13 Arabic countries, Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi was given an award for her diplomatic contributions to the Palestinian cause, including for her consistency in promoting its full membership at the UN. Furthermore, President Joko Widodo sends humanitarian aid to Gaza and Sudan, expressing ongoing concern for the region's humanitarian situation.



## [China and Indonesia vow to boost defence ties as Prabowo Subianto seeks to reassure Beijing ahead of inauguration](#)

—Hayley Wong, SouthChinaMorningPost, 3 April 2024

China and Indonesia pledge to enhance defense ties as president-elect Prabowo Subianto visits Beijing before his inauguration. They agree to intensify joint military drills and personnel exchanges. Prabowo met Chinese President Xi Jinping, Premier [Li Qiang](#) and defence chief Dong Jun. Prabowo assures continued friendly relations with China and expresses willingness to strengthen defense cooperation. Despite tensions in the South China Sea, Jakarta maintains a policy of non-alignment and seeks to balance ties with Beijing and Washington. Economic relations between China and Indonesia have flourished, with Indonesia being a top recipient of Chinese investment. However, conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea have strained relations. Negotiations for a code of conduct have stalled, but both sides agree to establish dialogue mechanisms for strategic communication and cooperation. Xi praised China-Indonesia cooperation under Widodo, which he said hinged on their “strategic independence and mutual trust”.

**End**