



Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

2025 Issue 6 — 13 March

*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. If you would like to add colleagues or friends to our distribution list or unsubscribe, please contact us at newsdigest@starlingresources.com.*

CONTENTS

- A. **Marine and Fisheries**
- B. **Forests and Land Use**
- C. **Biodiversity, Conservation and Protected Areas**
- D. **Climate Change, Energy and Mining**
- E. **Pollution, Waste and Disaster**
- F. **Technology, Investment and Finance**
- G. **Human Rights, Indigenous People and Gender Equality**

- I. **Indonesia in Politics and Geopolitics**

A. Marine and Fisheries

Indonesian fishers are still vulnerable to exploitation

—Gita Lingga, *ILO*, 11 March 2025

The first-ever ILO [2024 Survey on Decent Work in Marine Fishing](#), conducted with Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), reveals significant labour

rights violations in the country's fishing industry. Presented in Jakarta on March 11, the study assessed working conditions for 3,396 fishers across 18 ports. Key findings include forced labour, child labour, lack of employment contracts, excessive working hours, and minimal social protections. More than 90% of fishers lack formal contracts, 71% are without employment-related social security, and about 1,000 fishers were found in forced labour conditions. Nearly half of all fishers started working before turning 18, with over 600 identified as child labourers. The ILO urges Indonesia to align its labour laws with international standards, enforce fair recruitment, strengthen unionization, and improve safety conditions. The study supports Indonesia's efforts to protect fishers and combat human trafficking at sea. ILO Director Simrin Singh emphasized that these findings provide crucial data to guide policies ensuring fair treatment and better conditions for fishers.

Questions raised over maritime ministry ending probe on Tangerang sea barrier

—Nur Janti, *TheJakartaPost*, 9 March 2025

The Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry has ended its investigation into a 30-kilometer bamboo fence built in the coastal waters off Tangerang, Banten, despite public concern over the origins and purpose of the structure. Maritime Affairs Minister Sakti Wahyu Trenggono announced the decision on Feb. 27, naming Kohod village head Arsin and a village secretary as responsible. The ministry fined them Rp 48 billion (US\$2.95 million) but did not pursue further inquiries. Critics, including KIARA secretary-general Susan Herawati and legal expert Abdul Fickar Hadjar, argue that the decision is premature, suspecting larger players were involved. The fence, costing at least Rp 4 billion, was erected near a real estate megaproject, fueling speculation of land reclamation links. Meanwhile, the police have arrested four suspects for falsifying land documents related to the site. Legal experts urge authorities, including the Attorney General's Office and KPK, to continue investigations, warning of potential bribery. The police have not ruled out identifying new suspects.

Indonesia seeks alternative funding as USAID freeze delays marine conservation efforts

—Basten Gokkon, *Kompas*, 7 March 2025

The Trump administration's freeze on foreign aid, including USAID funding, has delayed several marine conservation programs in Indonesia, affecting projects like the Coral Triangle Initiative. The 90-day suspension, imposed through an executive order, has halted disbursements for conservation efforts that support coral reef rehabilitation and sustainable fisheries. Fisheries ministry officials, including Kusdiantoro, secretary for marine planning, and Agus Dermawan, an expert on coastal ecosystem management, acknowledged the impact, stating that long-term plans must be adjusted while alternative funding is sought. USAID has historically played a key role in initiatives like Ber-IKAN and Kolektif, which focus on environmental recovery and economic benefits for local communities. Despite uncertainties, experts emphasize that the suspension should not lead to program failure but rather serve as a catalyst for innovative financing, such as impact investments and non-cash financing models. The U.K. government has expressed interest in supporting marine conservation, while Indonesian stakeholders are urged to explore sustainable funding solutions to maintain conservation efforts amid the aid freeze.

EU, France's AFD Strengthen Support to Indonesia's Sustainable Ocean Management

—Annisa Lisya Bazlina, *TempoNews*, 6 March 2025

The European Union (EU) and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) have strengthened their support for Indonesia's sustainable ocean management by signing a

Contribution Agreement on March 5, 2025. As part of this initiative, AFD will manage EU grants totaling €7 million, alongside €187.6 million in loans, to support marine and coastal resource management over five years. The Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) will receive €3.55 million to modernize four fishing ports, while the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) will use €3.45 million for the KrisNa Project, aimed at improving marine scientific research and supporting national priorities. Officials emphasized the partnership's role in addressing climate change, safeguarding marine ecosystems, and advancing Indonesia's blue economy. EU Ambassador Denis Chaibi and French Ambassador Fabien Penone highlighted the collaboration's contribution to food security and scientific research, aligning with President Prabowo's Asta Cita agenda. AFD Country Director Yann Martres noted that the project will enhance understanding of Indonesia's seas and bridge the gap between science and policy.

Illegal sea fence displaces fishers and sparks land scandal near Jakarta

—Irfan Maulana and M Ambari, *Mongabay*, 3 March 2025

The illegal sea fence off the coast of Tangerang, Banten has sparked national controversy, highlighting environmental damage, fisher rights violations, and corporate land grabs. Built in early 2024, the 30-kilometer (19-mile) bamboo fence blocks access to traditional fishing grounds, threatening small-scale fishers' livelihoods. An investigation revealed that 280 ocean plots had been illegally titled, despite laws prohibiting private marine ownership. These deeds were traced to subsidiaries of the Agung Sedayu Group, developers of the luxury PIK 2 project. The blockade has forced many fishers to stop working, while coastal farmers have lost land to the same development. Fisher communities, already struggling with declining fish stocks, now face eviction as PIK 2 expands, pushing them into uncertain futures. Authorities have sanctioned individuals from both the public and private sectors and begun revoking the illegal deeds. However, activists demand criminal prosecutions of the companies involved. The Ministry of Marine Affairs confirmed zoning and environmental law violations, intensifying calls for accountability in this high-profile case of environmental and social injustice.

B. Forests and Land Use

Govt to continue oil palm cultivation on confiscated land

—Divya Karyza, *TheJakartaPost*, 11 March 2025

The Indonesian government plans to use over 221,000 hectares of confiscated oil palm plantations to support national energy security, sparking criticism from environmental groups. On Monday, prosecutors handed the land—seized in a corruption probe involving Duta Palma Group—to state-owned PT Agrinas Palma Nusantara for temporary management. Much of the land, located in protected forests in Sumatra and Kalimantan, was allegedly obtained through falsified permits. Environmentalists argue the plantations should be restored as forests. Greenpeace found that at least 45,280 hectares were illegally operated in forest areas and warned that using them for palm oil production could worsen deforestation and climate change. Critics also question the legality of transferring the land to Agrinas without an auction. Agrinas' president director Agus Utomo vowed to manage the plantations under sustainability standards and maintain jobs for workers. However, environmental groups insist the land should not be used for energy production. The case is part of broader government

efforts to control illegal forest use, with ongoing legal proceedings against Duta Palma and its founder.

The Risks of Handing Out Forest Concessions

—News Team, *TempoNews*, 6 March 2025

The Forestry Ministry is planning to grant concessions on conservation forests, raising concerns over greenwashing and policy contradictions. The Directorate-General of Natural Resources and Ecosystem Conservation is drafting a regulation allowing businesses to manage conservation areas for at least 30 years in exchange for restoring degraded forests. Concession holders would benefit by trading carbon credits, a system meant to offset emissions but often criticized for failing to deliver real reductions. The plan contradicts Indonesia's commitment to reaching net-zero emissions by 2060, as the country's carbon emissions rose to 41.6 billion tons in 2024—1 billion tons higher than the previous year. Critics argue that carbon trading allows polluters to continue emitting as long as they purchase offsets, instead of reducing their own emissions. Environmentalists warn that the policy could be exploited for profit rather than genuine conservation, with companies eager to capitalize on carbon trading. Calls are growing for stricter oversight to prevent further deforestation and ensure that conservation efforts are not compromised for short-term economic gain.

Civil Society Groups Urge EU to Consider Papua Deforestation Crisis in EUDR Benchmarking System

—Reporter, *TempoNews*, 4 March 2025

Twenty-two Indonesian civil society organizations have urged the European Commission to recognize the worsening deforestation crisis in Papua and its impact on Indigenous Malind and Yei communities. In a letter sent to key EU Commissioners, they called for Papua's risks to be fully considered in the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) benchmarking system, which will classify regions based on deforestation and human rights concerns before June 30. The organizations highlighted that over 2 million hectares of Papua's forests are threatened by large-scale plantations, including palm oil and timber industries. They stressed that clearing forests for rice and sugarcane plantations—though not covered by the EUDR—could still contribute to deforestation risks. Franky Samperante of Pusaka Bentala Rakyat warned of Indigenous rights violations, economic dispossession, and military intimidation. Giorgio Budi Indrarto of MADANI urged the EU to ensure Papua's risk classification reflects reality. The letter calls for stricter EU scrutiny, UN investigations into human rights violations, and sustainable food security solutions to prevent further deforestation.

Oil Palm Fine Corruption

—News Team, *TempoWeekly*, 3 March 2025

Indonesia's palm oil industry is embroiled in a major scandal involving the manipulation of fines for illegal deforestation, potentially costing the state IDR 300 trillion (\$20 billion). According to a task force at the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, fines imposed on around 2,000 palm oil companies were initially calculated under Ministerial Decree No. 661/2023, which accounted for the economic value of forests. However, a new decree, No. 815/2023, significantly reduced fines by only considering planted areas, leading to a drastic drop in collected revenue. The missing funds could have supported President Prabowo Subianto's free school lunch program, but instead, budget cuts have affected key public services. Prosecutors are now investigating irregularities, searching ministry offices and seizing electronic devices. The scandal highlights concerns over corporate land grabs and

environmental degradation, further fueling EU criticism of Indonesia's deforestation policies. Meanwhile, new regulations have extended legal immunity to mining companies, raising fears of continued impunity for environmental destruction.

Resolving the misguided perceptions of deforestation for sustainable growth

—Edi Suhardi, *TheJakartaPost*, 1 March 2025

Indonesia launched its new sovereign wealth fund, Danantara, on Feb. 24, prioritizing food and renewable energy investments. With \$900 billion in assets, palm oil development aligns with Danantara's goals, given its dual role as a food and biofuel source. However, expanding palm oil plantations requires land, raising concerns about deforestation and environmental impacts, which could hinder investment. The government must address these challenges to ensure economic and environmental viability. Indonesia designates 64% of its 188 million hectares as forest area, with the rest allocated for development. While the second-largest palm oil producer Malaysia aims to lead in palm-based renewable energy, Indonesia faces scrutiny over deforestation definitions. Differences in how forests are classified globally, particularly between national and FAO standards, fuel controversy. To mitigate concerns, experts suggest redefining forest classifications based on High Conservation Value (HCV) and High Carbon Stock (HCS) assessments. The government is also urged to introduce "justified deforestation" for specific investment areas, ensuring that land-use changes align with sustainability principles while supporting economic growth.

C. Biodiversity, Conservation and Protected Area

Endangered baby elephant separated from mother rescued in Indonesia

—AFP, *TheStraitsTimes*, 11 March 2025

Indonesian authorities rescued a critically endangered two-month-old Sumatran elephant calf after it was found alone at a palm oil plantation in Riau province on March 10, officials said. The baby elephant, suspected to have been separated from its mother or herd, was reported by local residents and taken to the conservation agency's elephant training center near Pekanbaru for care, according to Ujang Holisudin from the agency. The calf is in good health following medical checks, and authorities are monitoring nearby areas to locate its family for a possible reunion. Sumatran elephants are on the brink of extinction, with only about 2,400-2,800 remaining, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature. Rampant poaching and deforestation have severely threatened the species, leading to habitat loss and increased human-wildlife conflicts. Indonesia continues to battle wildlife crime, with several cases of elephant poisoning reported in recent years. Conservationists hope to reunite the calf with its herd while addressing broader threats to the species' survival.

Indonesia develops alternative funding to support marine conservation

—Muhammad Harianto and Yashinta Difa, *AntaraNews*, 3 March 2025

The Marine Affairs and Fisheries Ministry is advancing innovative funding strategies to support marine conservation and national food security. One key initiative is the small-scale fisheries Impact Bond, an outcome-based financing scheme that involves private investors to strengthen coastal economies while meeting conservation targets. Kusdiantoro, Secretary of the Directorate General of Marine and Marine Space Management, stressed the need for

alternative funding due to budget constraints. He highlighted Impact Bonds as a way to promote sustainable fisheries, support fishermen's welfare, and protect marine ecosystems. Indonesia aims to conserve 30% of its marine areas by 2045. Currently managing 29.9 million ha, the ministry plans to expand conservation efforts to 97.5 million ha and include 10 million ha of non-conservation areas under effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). To fund these initiatives, the ministry is also exploring debt-for-nature swaps with the U.S. and coral reef bonds with the World Bank. These efforts align with the Minister's vision of a blue economy, balancing ecological preservation and economic growth.

UN nature talks unlock \$200 billion deal for conservation

—Kelly Macnamara, *The Jakarta Post*, 1 March 2025

Rich and developing nations reached a crucial compromise in Rome on February 27 on securing and distributing billions of dollars to protect global biodiversity, overcoming divisions that stalled talks in Colombia last year. The agreement aims to support the 2022 UN pact to halt nature's destruction, which set a target of \$200 billion annually for biodiversity finance. The deal outlines two key actions: increasing biodiversity funding and deciding which institutions will manage the funds. It sets milestones for progress at upcoming UN nature meetings in 2026 and 2028, ultimately leading to a permanent financial mechanism to support conservation in the world's most biodiverse regions. Countries pledged to seek additional funding from multilateral banks and private businesses while reducing harmful subsidies by at least \$500 billion annually by 2030. A key dispute was whether to create a new biodiversity fund, as developing nations argue existing mechanisms are inadequate. The issue remains unresolved, with a decision postponed until 2028. The agreement also includes stricter monitoring and the launch of a fund to share profits from genetic resources with Indigenous communities.

Concerns of illegal sea turtle trade persist in Bali as police foil smugglers

—Luh De Suriyani, *Mongabay*, 27 February 2025

Conservation groups in Bali have raised concerns over the high number of live sea turtles seized from traffickers in early 2024, indicating illegal trade beyond ceremonial use. On January 12, police in Jembrana district confiscated 29 green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), five of which later died. Another 23 turtles were recovered on January 24 in Pemuteran, a coastal village. Authorities are still investigating the buyers, according to Bali conservation agency head Ratna Hendratmoko. Illegal turtle trade persists despite Indonesia's strict conservation laws, with poaching driven by demand for meat, aphrodisiacs, and spiritual purposes. A 2022 Arizona State University study estimated 1.1 million turtles were killed globally from 1990 to 2020, with green turtles making up 56% of cases. WWF Indonesia's Ranny R. Yuneni warned that consuming turtle meat carries a risk of chelonitoxism, a potentially fatal poisoning. Climate change further threatens sea turtles, as rising temperatures skew hatchling sex ratios, and rising sea levels flood nesting sites. Conservationists stress stronger enforcement to curb trafficking.

Senko, J. F., et al. (2022). [Global patterns of illegal marine turtle exploitation](#). *Global Change Biology*, 28(22), 6509-6523.

Semmouri, I., et al. (2024). [Health risks associated with the consumption of sea turtles: A review of chelonitoxism incidents and the presumed responsible phycotoxins](#). *Science of The Total Environment*, 954, 176330.

Pertiwi, N. P. D., et al. (2020). [Forensic genetic case study: Species identification and traceability of sea turtle caught in illegal trade in Bali, Indonesia](#). *Biodiversitas*, 21(9)

Patrício, A. R., et. al. (2019). [Climate change resilience of a globally important sea turtle nesting population](#). *Global Change Biology*, 25(2), 522-535.

Pollinator decline & climate change threaten chocolate production

—Bobby Bascomb, *Mongabay*, 27 February 2025

The global chocolate industry, worth \$100 billion annually, may face declining production due to climate change and pollinator loss, according to [Identifying Cocoa Pollinators](#) study. Researchers found that cacao pollination and temperature are key factors affecting yield. Conducting experiments in Brazil, Ghana, and Indonesia, they discovered that only 17% of cacao flowers were naturally pollinated, while hand-pollination increased yield by 20%. Additionally, cooler sites—by 7°C (12.6°F)—produced up to 31% more cacao than warmer ones during peak heat in December. Co-author Thomas Cherico Wanger stated that boosting pollination can help offset temperature-related declines. The study recommends reducing pesticide use and increasing leaf litter to support pollinators. Experts also suggest agroforestry—growing cacao alongside forests—to create a cooler microclimate and sustain pollinators. As global temperatures rise, these insights are crucial for ensuring chocolate production and protecting the livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers worldwide.

D. Climate Change, Energy and Mining

‘Global weirding’: climate whiplash hitting world’s biggest cities, study reveals

—Damian Carrington, *TheGuardian*, 12 March 2025

A new study reveals that extreme swings between drought and floods, known as "climate whiplash," are impacting major cities worldwide. Conducted by researchers from the University of Bristol and Cardiff University, the study analyzed climate trends over four decades in 112 major cities. It found that Jakarta, Indonesia along with Hangzhou in China and Dallas in the US, is experiencing some of the most severe climate fluctuations. The report highlights that 95% of cities studied show a clear trend toward either drier or wetter conditions, driven by fossil fuel-induced global warming. Jakarta, already prone to flooding, faces increasing risks as extreme rainfall intensifies. The rapid shifts between wet and dry conditions threaten infrastructure, sanitation, food security, and public health. Experts warn that aging water systems and rapid urbanization in vulnerable cities make adaptation challenging. The study reinforces the urgency for global climate action and investment in resilient infrastructure to mitigate future disasters. Without intervention, these unpredictable climate swings will continue to endanger lives and livelihoods.

Singer, M., et al. (2024). [Climatic controls on the length and shape of the world’s drainage basins](#). *Geophysical Research Letters*, 51(24).

Grounding Fasting

—Ahmad Arif, *Kompas*, 12 March 2025

Fasting, a practice observed across various religions, extends beyond spiritual purification to offer health, social, and environmental benefits. While Muslims in Indonesia fast throughout

Ramadan, fasting is also present in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and ancient traditions. Scientific studies suggest fasting promotes cellular regeneration, aiding physical and mental health. Historically, figures like Pythagoras and Hippocrates recognized its cognitive and healing benefits. Beyond individual well-being, fasting fosters social solidarity by cultivating empathy for the less fortunate and promoting zakat. It has also been used as a tool for activism, exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi who fasted in prison and Yeb Saño's hunger strike at COP19. Fasting can also reduce carbon emissions by limiting food waste and encouraging a shift towards plant-based, locally sourced diets. Despite its potential, religious communities often overlook fasting's environmental impact. Studies, including one by [Pew Research Center](#), indicate that many religious believers remain skeptical of climate change. Bridging faith and environmental action could transform fasting into a movement for climate awareness and sustainability.

Downstreaming Needs Industrialization to Prevent Nickel Profits from “Running Away”

—Aditya Putra Perdana, *Kompas*, 12 March 2025

Indonesia has intensified efforts to increase the added value of mineral mining, particularly nickel, since banning raw nickel ore exports in 2020. The move spurred smelter development, mainly in Sulawesi and Maluku, producing stainless steel and intermediate nickel products like ferronickel and nickel pig iron. However, while investment in electric vehicle battery materials has grown, the downstream process remains incomplete, with nickel sulfate and cobalt sulfate being the highest-value products currently refined. Industry experts warn that Indonesia must move beyond semi-finished exports, as much of its nickel output is still processed abroad, mainly in China. Indonesia continues to import finished goods like spoons and forks. Experts emphasize the need for a stronger industrial policy, better infrastructure, and cross-sectoral coordination to build a fully integrated nickel industry. The government plans to expand mineral downstreaming across 28 commodities, requiring an estimated \$618 billion in investment by 2040, with tax incentives and industry-friendly policies seen as crucial to achieving this goal.

Accelerating Downstream, Oil Refineries with a Capacity of One Million Barrels Will Be Built in Many Places

—Kurnia Yunita Rahayu and Nina Susilo, *Kompas*, 11 March 2025

The Indonesian government is accelerating its downstreaming program by increasing the planned capacity of new oil refineries from 500,000 to 1 million barrels per day. This decision was announced by Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia after a meeting with President Prabowo Subianto at the Merdeka Palace on March 10. The move aims to strengthen national energy resilience and ensure equitable distribution, with refineries set to be built in Kalimantan, Java, Sulawesi, and Maluku-Papua. The government is also promoting dimethyl ether (DME) as a substitute for LPG and expanding downstream processing in critical minerals like nickel, tin, and quartz sand. Funding for these projects will come from the Daya Anagata Nusantara Investment Management Agency (BPI Danantara), with a feasibility evaluation ensuring economic viability, import reduction, and job creation. Investment Minister Rosan Roeslani emphasized that projects must align with Indonesia's net-zero emissions target by 2060. The government is also welcoming both foreign and domestic investment to support downstream industrialization efforts.

Indonesia, South Africa say US withdrawing from climate finance deal

—AFP, *TheJakartaPost*, 7 March 2025

The United States has withdrawn from a climate funding deal aimed at helping developing countries transition from coal to clean energy, South Africa and Indonesia confirmed on March 6. The Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP), launched in 2021, involve wealthy nations financing emerging economies to phase out coal. South Africa was the first to sign a JETP, followed by Indonesia's \$20 billion partnership in 2022. Under President Donald Trump's administration, the US informed South Africa on February 28, that it would no longer contribute to the deal, citing executive orders issued in January and February. Indonesia's JETP Secretariat also confirmed that Washington withdrew from its commitments but would still support renewable energy projects aligned with US interests. The US had pledged \$56 million in grants and \$1 billion in potential commercial investments to South Africa. JETP Secretariat Head Paul Butarbutar confirmed that while Washington pulled out, the overall \$21.6 billion pledge from private and public donors remains unchanged. Despite this setback, Indonesia continues its efforts to shift away from coal and JETP remains a key initiative in securing sustainable energy solutions for the country's future.

E. Pollution, Waste and Disaster

Jakarta's floods worsen, displacing thousands as extreme weather, poor planning collide

Resty Woro Yuniar, *SouthChinaMorningPost*, 11 March 2025

Severe flooding in Jakarta and its surrounding cities has displaced 120,000 residents and caused the death of a young child, as extreme weather and poor urban planning worsen the capital's chronic flooding crisis. The disaster, which struck last week, affected the greater Jakarta region, including Bekasi, Depok, and Bogor in West Java, as well as Tangerang in Banten province. Indonesia's meteorological agency (BMKG) reported that heavy rainfall began on March 2 in Bogor, upstream of the Ciliwung River, which channels water into Jakarta. Rainfall levels ranged from 165mm to 208mm per day—far exceeding Jakarta's drainage system capacity of 150mm. The continued downpour caused rivers to overflow, submerging residential areas and damaging infrastructure, including bridges and vehicles. Experts warn that Jakarta's vulnerability to flooding is exacerbated by land subsidence, rapid urbanization, and inadequate drainage systems. With rainfall expected to persist until the end of March, authorities face mounting pressure to implement flood mitigation measures and improve climate resilience in Indonesia's capital.

Flood-Resistant Housing, An Inevitable Demand for Adaptation

Neli Triana, *Kompas*, 9 March 2025

Flooding has emerged as one of the deadliest disasters, displacing 26.4 million people worldwide in 2023, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). By the year's end, 7.7 million people had been forced to flee their homes, marking the second-highest displacement figure since 2019. Intensifying environmental degradation and extreme weather, driven by global warming, are exacerbating floods, especially in urban areas. Residents of Bekasi, Jakarta, and Tangerang faced severe flooding in early March 2025, with some trapped for nearly two days. Victims struggle with long-term trauma, financial burdens, and deteriorating living conditions. Flood control measures, including river dredging and retention dams, have failed to provide significant relief. Experts emphasize that disaster resilience varies based on government preparedness. While some cities adopt flood-resistant

housing and adaptive infrastructure, broader implementation remains slow. Floating and stilt houses have been piloted in Jakarta, but expansion efforts are stagnant. IDMC Director Alexandra Bilak stresses that without proactive policies, floods will continue to devastate communities, trapping many in cycles of poverty and displacement.

Microplastics Fill Wild Birds' Lungs, Indicating High Plastic Pollution in the Air

—Ahmad Arif, *Kompas*, 28 February 2025

A new study by the University of Texas Arlington (UTA) has found high concentrations of microplastics in the lungs of wild birds, raising concerns about airborne plastic pollution and its potential health risks. Published Thursday in the *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, the research examined 56 birds from 51 species near Chengdu Tianfu International Airport in China. Using advanced chemical analysis, researchers detected an average of 221 plastic particles per species and 416 particles per gram of lung tissue, primarily chlorinated polyethylene and butadiene rubber. Assistant professor Shane DuBay, co-author of the study, highlighted that birds serve as key environmental indicators, helping scientists assess pollution impacts. Microplastics, which can cause lung inflammation and cancer, are increasingly found in the air due to sources like tire wear and plastic waste. A related review in *Environmental Science & Technology* links airborne microplastics to serious health issues, including respiratory disease and infertility. Experts urge regulatory action to curb exposure, warning that plastic pollution threatens both ecosystems and human health.

Wang, M. et al. (2025). [Assessing microplastic and nanoplastic contamination in bird lungs: evidence of ecological risks and bioindicator potential](#), *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, 487, p. 137274.

Chartres, N. et al. (2024). [Effects of Microplastic Exposure on Human Digestive, Reproductive, and Respiratory Health: A Rapid Systematic Review](#), *Environmental Science & Technology*, 58(52).

Danger Alarm from Seribu Islands: Microplastics in Water, Leaves, and Human Skin

—Ahmad Arif, *Kompas*, 27 February 2025

Microplastic pollution in Indonesia is worsening, as recent research in the Thousand Islands has revealed contamination not just in water but also on plant leaves and human skin. To mark National Waste Awareness Day (HPSN) 2025 on February 21, the Zero Waste Indonesia Alliance (AZWI) conducted tests on Untung Jawa, Onrust, and Cipir Islands, finding microplastic fragments in all samples. Announced on February 23, the findings highlight the widespread impact of plastic pollution, originating from domestic waste, tourism, and waste burning. Rafika Aprilianti from Ecoton Laboratory, part of AZWI, warned that microplastics are entering the food chain, posing health risks. A Cornell University study (2024) identified Indonesia as the highest per capita consumer of microplastics, averaging 15 grams monthly. Experts urge stronger waste management and a ban on single-use plastics to mitigate the crisis. Without urgent action from the government, industry, and the public, microplastic pollution will continue to escalate, threatening both environmental and human health.

Marfella, R. et al. (2024). [Microplastics and Nanoplastics in Atheromas and Cardiovascular Events](#). *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 390(10), pp. 900–910.

Li, N. et al. (2024). [Prevalence and implications of microplastic contaminants in general human seminal fluid: A Raman spectroscopic study](#), *Science of the Total Environment*, 937, p. 173522.

Zhao, X. and Yu, F. (2024). [Microplastic Human Dietary Uptake from 1990 to 2018 Grew across 109 Major Developing and Industrialized Countries but Can Be Halved by Plastic Debris Removal](#), *Environmental Science & Technology* Vol 58/Issue 20

F. Technology, Investment and Finance

Govt looks to hike royalties for several mining products

Deni Ghifari, *TheJakartaPost*, 12 March 2025

The Indonesian government plans to increase royalties on several mining products by revising Government Regulation No. 26/2022, aiming to improve governance and boost state revenue. During an online public consultation, Tri Winarno, the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry's coal and mineral mining director general, said the new scheme would ensure the industry contributes more to national welfare. The proposal affects 12 mining products, with coal levies adjusted based on contract type, calorific value, and the Indonesian Coal Benchmark Price (HBA). Coal royalties could rise to 9–11.5%, while nickel royalties will shift from a flat 10% to a progressive system, reaching up to 19%. Nickel matte royalties will also increase, with windfall profit levies removed. Copper royalties will rise significantly, with copper ore levies jumping from 5% to 10–17%. Gold, silver, platinum, and tin will also see higher rates. The government argues these changes will optimize revenue without overburdening miners, but industry players warn of potential financial strain and reduced net incomes.

Danantara champions oil and gas projects ahead of renewables

—Ruth Dea Juwita, *TheJakartaPost*, 12 March 2025

Danantara, Indonesia's newest sovereign wealth fund, will prioritize oil and gas projects over renewable energy in its first investment round, officials confirmed Tuesday. Eniya Listiani Dewi, the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry's renewables director general, said the move aligns with Energy Minister Bahlil Lahadalia's directive to secure gas supply amid ongoing energy transition efforts. The 2024-2033 electricity procurement plan (RUPTL) allocates 75% of new capacity to renewables but relies on gas as a balancing source. National gas demand is projected to rise significantly, reaching 2,659 billion British thermal units per day by 2034. President Prabowo Subianto launched Danantara in February, pledging to finance large-scale projects, but the government announced last week that the initial \$40 billion investment would focus on 21 natural resource processing projects, including oil refineries and coal gasification. Renewable projects remain under review, with potential investments in biofuel, geothermal, hydro, and solar power. Critics argue coal gasification is costly, and global financial institutions are increasingly withdrawing from coal-related investments.

VinFast plans to install EV charging stations across Indonesia, minister says

—Stefanno Sulaiman and Stanley Widiyanto, *Reuters*, 11 March 2025

Vietnamese electric vehicle (EV) maker VinFast plans to install up to 100,000 charging stations across Indonesia, Investment Minister Rosan Roeslani announced Tuesday after President Prabowo Subianto met with company representatives. VinFast is also set to begin operations at its \$200 million EV assembly plant in West Java next year, with a production

capacity of 50,000 units annually. Indonesia, aiming to become an EV manufacturing hub, is leveraging its nickel reserves—key for EV batteries—and offering incentives to automakers. EV adoption has surged in recent months, with electric cars driving a 2.2% year-on-year increase in February car sales, the first rise since June 2023. VinFast’s charging network is expected to accelerate growth, with the company already selecting locations for installation, Rosan said. The firm is also considering investments in Indonesia’s renewable energy sector, including wind farms and solar panels. Prabowo’s meeting with VinFast followed a bilateral discussion with Vietnamese Communist Party chief To Lam, where both nations pledged to enhance economic cooperation.

Govt delays monthly budget data relay, as experts warn likely revenue drop

Vincent Fabian Thomas, *TheJakartaPost*, 10 March 2025

Indonesia’s Finance Ministry has failed to release its monthly state budget data for January, sparking concerns over transparency and potential revenue declines. The delay, unprecedented since the ministry began publishing the *APBN KiTa* report in 2017, comes amid economic uncertainties and issues with the newly implemented Coretax system. Finance Ministry spokesperson Deni Surjantoro attributed the delay to scheduling conflicts, promising the data would be released later in March. However, analysts fear the missing data signals a sharp drop in tax revenue, with economist Bhima Yudhistira warning that reduced transparency could undermine investor confidence. Coretax, intended to streamline tax administration, has been plagued by technical issues, leading to delays in tax invoice issuance. January’s tax revenue reportedly fell to Rp 50 trillion from Rp 172 trillion a year earlier. The government has since postponed full implementation of the system. With economic indicators such as car sales and consumption loans weakening, experts predict further revenue shortfalls. The government’s budget cuts and the establishment of sovereign wealth fund Danantara add further uncertainty to fiscal stability.

Palm Oil Industry: Be Cautious Amid High Prices of Popular Commodities

—Emanuel Edi Saputra, *Kompas*, 7 March 2025

Indonesia’s crude palm oil (CPO) faces a competitiveness threat due to its soaring international price, surpassing other vegetable oils. If unaddressed, Indonesia could lose key export markets. The Indonesian Palm Oil Association (Gapki) reported a decline in 2024 CPO and palm kernel oil production to 52.76 million tons from 54.84 million tons in 2023, with exports falling by 2.68 million tons. The largest drops were to China, India, and the EU. Secretary-General of Gapki, Hadi Sugeng, attributed the price surge—now around \$1,200 per ton—to low production caused by El Niño and stagnating smallholder plantation rejuvenation. Despite rising prices, industry leaders warn that continued high costs could push global buyers toward alternative vegetable oils. To maintain competitiveness, Gapki urges increased domestic production through improved plantation rejuvenation. However, regulatory and financial hurdles have slowed progress, with only 38,000 hectares rejuvenated out of the 120,000-hectare target for 2024. Meanwhile, China emerges as a key market, as exports to Europe decline due to stricter policies and higher prices.

G. Human Rights, Indigeous People and Gender Equality

Acceleration for Gender Equality Stalled

Elsa Emiria Leba, *Kompas*, 12 March 2025

The UN adopted a political declaration on March 10, in New York, reaffirming its commitment to gender equality amid growing opposition to women's rights worldwide. The declaration, endorsed by all 193 member states at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting, aims to accelerate progress toward the goals set by the 1995 Beijing Declaration. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned of a resurgence of patriarchal oppression, citing increasing restrictions on women's rights, attacks on reproductive and economic freedoms, and persistent gender-based violence. A UN Women report from early March revealed that nearly a quarter of governments reported backlash against women's rights in 2024. The declaration calls for concrete actions, including integrating women's leadership in peacebuilding, expanding economic opportunities, addressing digital gender violence, and reducing the burden of unpaid domestic work. UN Women's chief Sima Bahous stressed that no country has achieved full gender equality and urged global action. The declaration also renewed calls for a female UN chief, with Guterres' successor to be elected in 2026.

Peace is More Sustainable When There is a Role for Women

Ester Lince Napitupulu, *Kompas*, 9 March 2025

The Leimena Institute and Istiqlal Mosque marked International Women's Day on March 8, 2025, by emphasizing the vital role of women in peacebuilding. During a webinar on gender equality and social cohesion, Indah Nuria Savitri, Director at Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cited data showing that peace agreements are 35% more likely to last 15 years when women are actively involved. She urged for greater female representation in diplomacy and decision-making. Leimena Institute's Executive Director, Matius Ho, highlighted the role of women educators in fostering tolerance. He shared the story of two female teachers from Ambon, Maluku, who promoted interfaith harmony using local traditions. Minister of Religious Affairs, Nasaruddin Umar, called for correcting gender-biased interpretations of religious texts, stressing that Islam supports women's leadership. Meanwhile, Istiqlal Mosque's Voice of Istiqlal initiative promotes female Islamic scholars. G20 Interfaith Association Vice President Katherine Marshall emphasized female leadership traits like empathy and collaboration, urging greater inclusion of women in peace efforts worldwide.

Natalius Pigai voices support for Indigenous Peoples Bill passage

Rendra and Kenzu, *AntaraNews*, 8 March 2025

Minister of Human Rights Natalius Pigai reaffirmed his support for the passage of the Indigenous Peoples Bill, emphasizing its importance in protecting, preserving, and developing indigenous rights. Speaking in Sepang Village, Mempawah District, West Kalimantan, Pigai stated that the Ministry of Human Rights is committed to working with various parties to ensure indigenous communities receive the protection they deserve. The bill focuses on three key aspects: safeguarding indigenous culture and rights, fostering their development, and shielding them from external threats. Pigai stressed the need to prevent indigenous traditions from being eroded by policies or external pressures. Currently, the ministry is awaiting discussions with indigenous organizations to finalize the bill's substance. However, differing views between indigenous groups and local communities over land rights remain a challenge. Pigai emphasized that the government has a duty to uphold indigenous rights through legal intervention, education, and competency-building efforts. With full ministerial support, the bill is expected to pass soon, providing a solid legal framework for indigenous rights protection.

Indonesian court blocks palm oil expansion, but leaves Indigenous land rights in limbo

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 6 March 2025

The Indonesian Supreme Court has upheld the government's decision to halt the expansion of a massive oil palm plantation in Papua, rejecting lawsuits by PT Megakarya Jaya Raya (MJR) and PT Kartika Cipta Pratama (KCP). The ruling, issued on December 2, 2024, spares 65,415 hectares of rainforest from further clearance, reinforcing the Ministry of Environment and Forestry authority to regulate forest use. The Tanah Merah project, spanning 280,000 hectares, has long been plagued by licensing irregularities and ownership disputes. The Awyu Indigenous tribe, whose ancestral lands are threatened, welcomed the decision but noted it does not recognize their land rights. Greenpeace Indonesia's Sekar Banjaran Aji said the ruling empowers the government to take stricter action against destructive palm oil projects. Despite the ruling, new companies such as PT Agro Subur Sejati and PT Pertiwi Agro Mandiri are entering the area, sparking further legal battles. Meanwhile, the #AllEyesonPapua campaign continues to raise awareness about Indigenous land rights, garnering over 258,000 signatures to stop further deforestation in Tanah Merah.

Facing possible eviction, North Sumatra farmers contest palm oil giant

—Achmad Rizki Muazam, *Mongabay*, 6 March 2025

An Indonesian palm oil company, PT Sinar Mas Agro Resources and Technology (SMART), has temporarily halted the eviction of several hundred farmers in Aek Kuo, North Sumatra, following a last-minute court intervention. The eviction order, issued by a local court on Feb. 20, authorized SMART to establish an oil palm plantation on 83.5 hectares of land. However, the farmers, who have lived there for decades, claim the eviction violates their rights. In response, some farmers traveled to Jakarta to seek help from the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM). Following Komnas HAM's mediation, the court postponed the eviction, initially scheduled for Feb. 28, to March 6. The farmers argue they hold official land tenure certificates dating back to the 1950s, yet previous court rulings have favored SMART's plantation permit. Land conflicts are common in Indonesia, with 295 cases reported in 2024 alone. Sinar Mas spokesperson Stephan Sinisuka stated the company is committed to seeking a peaceful resolution.

UN accuses Indonesia's No. 2 palm oil firm of rights & environmental abuses

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 3 March 2025

The United Nations has accused Indonesia's second-largest palm oil company, PT Astra Agro Lestari (AAL), of human rights and environmental abuses, marking the first time it has singled out a company rather than the industry. In October 2024, U.N. special rapporteurs sent letters to AAL, its parent companies Astra International and Jardine Matheson, and the governments of Indonesia and China, alleging AAL operates without proper permits on Indigenous lands in Sulawesi without free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). The UN highlighted claims that AAL's subsidiaries have used violence, intimidation, and legal persecution to suppress community protests, with police and security forces allegedly cracking down on dissent. Environmental degradation, including water pollution, was also cited. AAL claims to be addressing these issues through an action plan, but critics, including watchdog groups like Friends of the Earth, argue it lacks meaningful land restitution. The Indonesian government defended AAL, citing its legal compliance, but acknowledged some subsidiaries operate without required permits, raising concerns about regulatory enforcement.

Track Record Determines Which Women Are Elected as Regional Heads in the 2024 Regional Elections

—MB Dewi Pancawati, Zikrina Ratri and Nurul Intan, *Kompas*, 27 February 2025

A total of 49 female leaders won in Indonesia's 2024 Regional Head Elections, marking a significant step for gender representation in politics. Of these, 24 were incumbents, indicating that experience played a crucial role in their victories. President Prabowo Subianto inaugurated 43 of them—two governors, six mayors, and 35 regents—on February 20, at the State Palace in Jakarta. The rise in female leadership reflects growing public acceptance of women in governance, despite ongoing challenges such as political costs and gender stereotypes. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection reported a 90% increase in female participation compared to 2020. Key factors behind their victories include incumbency, large coalition support, and regional representation. Notable winners include Khofifah Indar Parawansa the East Java Governor and first-time female leaders in various regions. While progress continues, female participation in leadership remains below parity. Their success is expected to inspire more women to enter politics, fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy in Indonesia.

I. Indonesia in Politics and Geopolitics

Outcry against nepotism, cronyism in government

—Radhiyaa Indra, *TheJakartaPost*, 12 March 2025

A growing wave of nepotism and cronyism allegations under Prabowo Subianto's administration has sparked public outcry and raised concerns over governance and accountability. The latest controversy involves Forestry Minister Raja Juli Antoni, who appointed himself and at least ten fellow Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) members — including deputy chair Andy Budiman and his wife— to the Forestry and Other Land Use (FOLU) Net Sink 2030 program. The move prompted backlash over potential misuse of funds, with social media users and lawmakers urging donor countries to reassess funding. Raja has yet to comment, while Andy did not respond to media inquiries. Similarly, Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin's brother was appointed to lead state mining giant MIND ID, further fueling criticism. Analysts argue nepotism has worsened since Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka's controversial candidacy, weakening ethical standards. Experts warn such practices erode democracy, undermine merit-based governance, and foster corruption. Concerns have also been raised over Prabowo's key programs, including the free meals initiative and sovereign wealth fund, both facing scrutiny over effectiveness and mismanagement.

Soldier must retire, resign before serving in civilian posts: TNI commander

—News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 11 March 2025

Indonesian Military (TNI) commander Gen. Agus Subiyanto reaffirmed that active-duty officers must resign before taking civilian posts, following concerns over rising militarism under President Prabowo Subianto's administration. Citing Article 47 of the 2004 TNI Law, Agus emphasized that military personnel cannot hold civilian offices unless they retire, with exceptions for defense, security, and intelligence roles. His statement comes amid controversy over Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya's promotion from major to lieutenant colonel, despite already serving in a civilian role under Prabowo's government. Additionally, Maj. Gen. Novi Helmy Prasetya's appointment as head of the State Logistics Agency (Bulog) has sparked fears of a return to the military's dual function doctrine, which allowed

widespread military involvement in governance during the Soeharto era. Observers warn that an ongoing revision of the TNI Law by the House of Representatives could formally reinstate this practice. A 2023 [Kajian UU No. 34 Tahun 2024](#) by human rights group Imparsial found over 2,500 active military personnel occupying civilian positions, violating existing regulations.

Indonesia and Vietnam agree to upgrade strategic ties

—AFP, *ChannelNewsAsia*, 10 March 2025

Indonesia and Vietnam agreed on March 10 to upgrade their bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership during a meeting between Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary To Lam and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta. The agreement aims to strengthen cooperation in economic and defense sectors, marking 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Following their talks, Prabowo announced plans to enhance collaboration in fisheries, the digital and green economy, high-tech industries, and security. He also confirmed his upcoming visit to Vietnam to sign an economic cooperation agreement, pending Indonesian parliamentary approval next month. The agreement comes as both nations navigate tensions in the South China Sea, where they have overlapping claims. In 2019, Jakarta summoned Vietnam's ambassador after a confrontation between the Vietnamese coast guard and Indonesian authorities over illegal fishing. Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation, has been cracking down on foreign fishing vessels in its waters, asserting sovereignty over the North Natuna Sea to protect its economic interests.

USAID closure opens opportunity for Indonesia to be donor country

—Nabil Ihsan and Yashinta Difa, *AntaraNews*, 7 March 2025

Indonesia sees the shutdown of USAID as an opportunity to transition from an aid recipient to a donor nation, according to Foreign Ministry spokesperson Rolliansyah "Roy" Soemirat. Speaking at a press briefing in Jakarta on Thursday (March 6), Roy stated that Indonesia, as a G20 member with a rapidly growing economy, aims to align its foreign economic policies with its expanding financial capabilities. Following the official closure of USAID's headquarters in Washington D.C. last month, ordered by President Donald Trump and announced by Head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) Elon Musk, USAID-funded projects in multiple countries, including Indonesia, have been affected. In 2023, USAID allocated approximately \$153 million to support various programs in Indonesia. While the full impact remains unclear, Roy assured that Indonesia's development programs rely primarily on the State Budget, with foreign aid serving only as a complementary resource. He emphasized ongoing coordination with relevant ministries to ensure continuity of government initiatives, regardless of external funding changes.

UN slashes support for Rohingya refugees in Indonesia due to Trump cuts

—Reuters, *TheJakartaPost*, 7 March 2025

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced it would halt healthcare and cash assistance for 925 Rohingya refugees in Pekanbaru, starting March 5 due to funding constraints. A February 28 letter from IOM, seen by Reuters, attributed the cuts to a sharp reduction in foreign aid from the United States under President Trump's administration. While some support will continue for the most vulnerable, the decision leaves hundreds of refugees without essential aid. Indonesia hosts around 2,800 Rohingya refugees, many of whom fled persecution in Myanmar and dire conditions in Bangladesh. The 925 in Pekanbaru, near Malaysia, depend entirely on cash assistance and are prohibited from working. Local officials expressed concern about potential unrest and are seeking help from non-profits. The funding crisis is part of a broader humanitarian shortfall. The World Food Programme recently

announced it would halve food rations for over a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. IOM said it remains committed to delivering aid and is engaging donors, including the US, to sustain critical services.

Update to the story: The UN migration agency has reinstated aid for Rohingya refugees in Indonesia after initially cutting support due to US President Donald Trump's foreign aid freeze, an official confirmed on March 11. The reversal restores humanitarian assistance for nearly 1,000 refugees in Pekanbaru. More than 2,000 Rohingya remain in Indonesia under legal uncertainty, relying on UN aid. Indonesia, not a signatory to the UN refugee convention, urges regional countries to share resettlement responsibilities. Source: [UN migration agency says aid to Rohingya in Indonesia reinstated | Reuters](#)

End