



Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

2024 Issue 2 — 25 January

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 and Waste
- F. Investment and Finance
- G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

- I. RI General Elections
- II. Indonesia in Geopolitics

A. Marine and Fisheries

[Fisheries Certification Encouraged to Assure Quality](#)

—BM Lukita Grahadyarini, *Kompas*, 23 January 2024

The Indonesian government is prioritizing fisheries quality assurance from upstream to downstream production processes. The Agency for the Control and Monitoring of Quality of Marine and Fisheries Products is implementing a system that includes certification for cultivation, catching, handling, and processing of fish, ensuring adherence to global, regional, and national market standards. Certifications cover various aspects, such as good fish farming methods, hatcheries, feed manufacturing, medicine production, distribution, and fish

handling, as well as health and hazard analysis. These certifications aim to enhance trust, facilitate access to export markets, build a positive image in the domestic and global markets, and improve competitiveness. The Agency targets the development of 35 quality testing laboratories for fishery products assurance in 2024, addressing issues of quality caused by the lack of a cold chain infrastructure from upstream to downstream. The government's push for fisheries downstreaming is deemed insufficient, with concerns raised about low-value fish and inadequate attention to the cold chain outside fishing ports.

[Indonesia opens access to alternative markets for shrimp exports](#)

—Rahmad Nasution, *ANTARANewsAgency*, 22 January 2024

Indonesia's Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries aims to broaden market access for its shrimp commodities by targeting non-traditional markets in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Minister Sakti Wahyu Trenggono identified the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South Africa, and China as potential markets with significant growth opportunities. Despite the Chinese shrimp market's rapid expansion, Indonesia's share remains relatively small at 1.8% in 2022. To bolster market access, the ministry encourages collaboration among farmers, suppliers, processors, and various industry associations. Trenggono emphasizes the importance of innovation in ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat shrimp products to align with market trends. The ministry also addresses challenges, including anti-dumping charges by the American Shrimp Processors Association in October 2023 against Indonesian frozen shrimp exports to the US market, by devising strategic steps and periodic distribution of market analysis to industry stakeholders.

[Indonesia offers lobster larvae exports to Vietnam in exchange for investment](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 13 January 2024

Indonesia is exploring a deal with Vietnam to resume direct exports of lobster larvae in exchange for investment in Indonesia's lobster farming industry. The Indonesian Fisheries Minister, Sakti Wahyu Trenggono, announced during a visit to Hanoi that the country is seeking Vietnam's expertise in lobster aquaculture. Indonesia banned lobster larvae exports in 2016 to curb overharvesting of wild populations. The minister's proposal involves exporting larvae to Vietnam and potentially allowing up to 300 million lobster larvae shipments in exchange for investment. Indonesia aims to tap into Vietnam's advanced lobster farming sector, valued at over US\$120 million, and boost its own aquaculture productivity. Despite concerns about potential harm to the domestic industry, the Indonesian government plans to finalize a decree to resume lobster larvae exports under certain conditions, including partnering with aquaculture farmers and releasing a percentage back into the wild. Critics argue that resuming exports may undermine domestic aquaculture and pose a threat to the sustainability of wild lobster populations.

B. Forests and Land Use

[Minister Siti Nurbaya Counters 12.5 Million Hectares Deforestation Claim](#)

—Faisal Maliki Baskoro, *TheJakartaGlobe*, 24 January 2024

Indonesia's Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya refutes vice-presidential candidate, who is also her fellow minister, Mahfud MD's claim of 12.5 million hectares of deforestation since 2013. Nurbaya, along with Washington DC-based World Research Institute (WRI), rectified Global Forest Watch (GFW) and University of Maryland data, reducing deforestation figures for Indonesia by almost 54%, from 230,000 to 107,000

hectares in 2022. The correction followed a joint field review in June 2022, revealing misclassifications of non-natural forest areas as primary forests. Nurbaya stressed the importance of field checks and ongoing technical collaboration with WRI to strengthen forest data. Additionally, corrections are underway for inaccuracies in GFW's forest fire data, with joint analyses planned for 2023 deforestation data at the end of February. Representative of the Norwegian government, who participated in the field inspection, supports these efforts to ensure accurate deforestation information.

[Indonesia, U.S. Join Hands to Bolster Environmental Sustainability](#)

—Suci Sekarwati, *TempoEnglish*, 23 January 2024

Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) and the United States Forestry Service (USFS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support Indonesia's Forest and Land Use (FOLU) Net Sink 2030 plan. The agreement, signed by USFS Head Randy Moore and MoEF Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar, aims to enhance global environmental sustainability and climate resilience. The MOU commits the two countries to collaborate on sustainable forest management, forest carbon, fire control, and education and training. The partnership recognizes the critical role of forests in carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. Under the agreement, the USFS will provide technical expertise and support to help Indonesia achieve its ambitious 2030 goals, fostering sustainable forest management and furthering FOLU Net Sink 2030 objectives. Capacity-building programs, including education and training, will empower stakeholders and local communities, ensuring inclusive and widely shared benefits of sustainable forest management. The collaboration aligns with global efforts to combat climate change and environmental degradation.

[Indonesia is clearing vast peatlands to grow food. Climate costs are dire](#)

—Rebecca Tan, Dera Menra Sijabat and Winda Charmila, *TheWashingtonPost*, 19 January 2024

Extensive clearance of tropical peatland for agricultural purposes is causing alarm among environmentalists. The Indonesian government's ambitious land-clearance operation aims to transform 2,000 to 4,000 square miles of predominantly peatland into fields for crops like rice, corn, and cassava. While officials project achieving food self-sufficiency, environmentalists warn of devastating and likely irreversible consequences for the climate. Peatlands, storing twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined, release substantial carbon when drained, contributing to climate change. Critics question the success of the Food Estate project, citing research showing tropical peatlands tend to be too acidic for crops. Widespread crop failures have been documented in areas targeted by the project, and environmental groups argue against the ongoing land clearance. Indonesia's peatlands have been rapidly degrading for decades, exacerbated by the Mega Rice Project in the 1990s, contributing to large-scale fires in 2015. The government's current project faces criticism for some environmental and social impacts, with concerns about its potential success and adherence to sustainable practices.

[2023 fires increase fivefold in Indonesia amid El Niño](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 10 January 2024

Fires consumed almost 2.47 million acres of land and forests in Indonesia in 2023, marking the worst fire season since 2019, fueled by El Niño and burning for new plantations, according to data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. The affected area is 15 times the size of Jakarta. The 2023 fires represent a fivefold increase from 2022 but a 30.8% decline compared to the severe 2019 season. South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and South Sumatra were the hardest-hit provinces. The fires, intensified in Central Kalimantan, lasted longer, indicating peat fires. Experts suggest that locals burn abandoned farmlands for

new plantations due to a lack of local jobs. To curb fires, the government has been cracking down on companies with fires in their concessions, shuttering 47 burning areas, including oil palm plantations, and filing eight civil lawsuits in 2023. However, difficulties persist in collecting fines from companies found liable for environmental violations. In 2023, three companies paid fines, including PT Kallista Alam, which took a decade to fully settle its US\$23 million fine for burning a peat forest in the Tripa swamp.

C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area

[Four Sumatran tigers severely ill as Medan Zoo struggles with funding, mismanagement](#)

—Apriadi Gunawan, *TheJakartaPost*, 19 January 2024

The Medan Zoo in North Sumatra, Indonesia, faces a severe crisis affecting its Sumatran tigers due to institutional mismanagement and a funding shortage. Three tigers have died over the past two months, with four others reported to be severely ill. The zoo, overseen by city-owned development firm Pembangunan Kota Medan, has not undergone maintenance since 2005, resulting in deteriorating enclosures. A funding decline exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic has left the zoo financially strained, struggling to pay vendors and employees. Medan Zoo's manager, Pernius Harefa, reported debts of approximately US\$19,190 for animal feed and acknowledged the financial crisis. The Environment and Forestry Ministry, along with the Indonesian Zoo Association, is intervening to assist the zoo. The ministry plans to provide support for animal feed, veterinary care, enclosure repairs, and consultations with experts. The mayor of Medan, Bobby Nasution, acknowledges the mismanagement and emphasizes prioritizing animal welfare. With a significant drop in visitors due to the pandemic, the city administration is exploring options to address the zoo's challenges and ensure the well-being of its animals.

[National park releases Javan hawk-eagle after rehabilitation](#)

—Theresia Sufa, *TheJakartaPost*, 11 January 2024

Mount Gede Pangrango National Park in Indonesia has successfully released an adult female Javan hawk-eagle named Kalina into the wild after 21 months of rehabilitation. The release, overseen by the park's chief, Sapto Aji Prabowo, took place at the Cimungkad Resort in Sukabumi regency, West Java, on January 4. Kalina was initially received for rehabilitation on March 14, 2022, from the West Java Natural Resources Conservation Agency. Keepers from Mount Gede Pangrango National Park and Mount Halimun Salak National Park's Center's Javan Hawk-Eagle Rescue Center collaborated in the rehabilitation process. After thorough health and behavioral inspections, along with a survey of potential release locations, Kalina was deemed "ready for release." The Javan hawk-eagle, listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List, is a flagship species for Mount Gede Pangrango National Park. The successful release is a positive step towards preserving the population of this endangered species and highlights the importance of conservation efforts in protected areas.

D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

[Java's crumbling coastline and rising tide swamp jasmine flower trade](#)

—Moh. Tamimi, *Mongabay*, 24 January 2024

Jasmine growers along Indonesia's north coast, particularly in Central Java province, face increasing vulnerability to coastal erosion and rising sea levels. As the land sinks and high tides become more severe, the livelihoods of farmers like Sobirin, who once grew jasmine near the beach, are under threat. Sobirin has raised the floor of his house multiple times in response to storm surges and the encroaching sea, receiving limited government assistance. Coastal erosion has not only affected agriculture but also impacted aquaculture ponds, causing widespread economic losses. Attempts to build stone barriers between villages and the Java Sea have had limited success. Rising sea levels and coastal abrasion pose challenges not only for jasmine growers but for communities worldwide, forcing adaptation strategies and raising questions about relocation and economic viability. The emotional attachment to homes and the difficulty of finding alternative income sources in new locations contribute to the complexities of addressing the impacts of coastal erosion.

Demands from China, India to Boost Indonesia's Coal Production

—Jayanty Nada Shofa, *TheJakartaGlobe*, 23 January 2024

China and India are expected to drive Indonesia's coal production beyond the 2024 target, as per the Indonesia Mining and Energy Forum (IMEF). While Indonesia aims to produce 710 million tons of coal in 2024, it exceeded the 2023 target with a record-high 775 million tons in the previous year, with 518 million tons exported. IMEF Chairman Singgih Widagdo anticipates production to range between 750 million and 775 million tons in 2024 due to demand from China and India, which collectively receive over half of Indonesia's coal exports. To address potential import reductions, Singgih suggests the Indonesian government to form a team and engage in government-to-government discussions with China and India. This is to anticipate the possibility of the two countries putting the brakes on coal imports, which would not only have a fatal blow to the industry but also the environment. India, aiming to cut down imports, announced plans to produce 1.3 billion tons of coal by 2025.

Indonesia to import three million tons of rice in 2024: minister

—Tia Mutiasari, *AntaraNewsAgency*, 21 Januari 2024

Indonesia plans to import 3 million tonnes of rice in 2024 to address a 2.3 million tonne rice deficit caused by the El Niño weather pattern, according to the Coordinating Economic Minister. Last year, the country imported 3.5 million tonnes of rice. President Joko Widodo has already approved the importation of 2 million tonnes of rice from Vietnam and Thailand to secure national rice stocks, an import decision necessary to strengthen the Government's Rice Reserve stocks amid the decline in domestic rice production. Statistics Indonesia estimated that Indonesia would experience a rice deficit in the January-February 2024 period, with a total deficit of 2.83 million tonnes. Head of the National Food Agency (Bapanas) Arief Prestyo Adi emphasized the importance of implementing precautionary measures to address a potential rise in rice prices, and asserted that his agency would provide ongoing efforts to ensure a balanced pricing structure for farmers, producers, and consumers.

Renewable energy developments need to be backed up by science, scientists say

—Theresia Sufa, *TheJakartaPost*, 11 January 2024

Indonesia's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2060 or earlier is underlined by its significant renewable energy potential, but experts caution that development must align with scientific research. Dian Ediana Rae, head of the Financial Services Authority's banking supervision division, highlighted Indonesia's strategic position on the "ring of fire," providing up to 40% of the world's geothermal energy. Despite the country's potential of 3,686 gigawatts in renewable energy, renewables contribute only 15% to Indonesia's energy mix. Damayanti Buchori, head of the IPB Center of Sustainable and Transdisciplinary Science,

emphasized the need for holistic development backed by scientific research, considering economic and social conditions. She cautioned that while electric vehicles reduce emissions, charging them with electricity from coal diminishes their environmental benefit. Damayanti also highlighted the importance of sustainable mining practices for battery components like lithium. Additionally, she emphasized the need to preserve forests to harness geothermal energy, which relies on healthy water sources protected by forests. The call is for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to renewable energy development to effectively reduce emissions in Indonesia.

[Extreme Weather Will Become the Biggest Threat to the Global Economy in 2024, Is Indonesia Ready?](#)

—Dimas Waraditya Nugraha, *Kompas*, 11 January 2024

The 2024 Global Risk Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) highlights extreme weather conditions as the top global risk. Environmental degradation, driven by global warming, poses a serious threat to the world economy. The increase in global temperatures can lead to climate anomalies, disrupting economic activities. Extreme weather, compounded by conflicts and geopolitical tensions, is expected to impact food and energy supply chains, contributing to elevated food prices. The data, collected through the Global Risk Perception Survey, indicates that respondents consider extreme weather, intensified by El Niño, as the most significant risk in 2024. There is an urgent need for effective policies to mitigate climate change and protect national economies. WEF calls for global cooperation to address this serious challenge. Other global risks include failure to mitigate climate change, failure to adapt to climate change, loss of biodiversity, ecological collapse, scarcity of natural resources, and the potential impact of misinformation and disinformation during the 2024 elections in over 50 countries.

E. Pollution and Waste

[Indonesia's Efforts to Be Free of Plastic Waste by 2030 Are Still Steep](#)

—Ambrosius Harto Manumoyoso, *Kompas*, 24 January 2024

Indonesia's goal to become plastic-waste-free by 2030 faces challenges due to suboptimal waste management, revealed a plastic waste census conducted by the Nusantara River Research Body (BRUIN). The census covered 64 locations in 30 regencies/cities across 13 provinces from 2022-2023, collecting nearly 25,800 pieces of plastic waste. The study found that unbranded producers and national/multinational corporations contribute significantly to plastic waste. The census also highlighted concerns about microplastics in water, with rivers, lakes, beaches, and other open waters containing various plastic waste, including bags, food/drinks packaging, and consumer goods. When it fails to be treated, plastic waste becomes microplastics that pollute the environment and pose a serious health risk to human beings. Experts suggest addressing waste upstream through extending the responsibility of manufacturers and producers and holding them accountable for distribution, collection, storage, and recycling of the plastic waste.

[Jakarta's long fight for healthier air persists](#)

—*TheJakartaPost*, 15 January 2024

Jakarta faced a severe battle against air pollution in 2023, ranking among the world's top 10 most polluted cities for several months, reaching hazardous levels. Data from Swiss company IQAir revealed Jakarta's air quality at 177, categorized as "unhealthy," with PM2.5

concentrations 20 times above World Health Organization recommendations. Transboundary pollutants from coal-fired plants and industrial areas were identified as major contributors. The government attributed the smog to vehicle emissions but lacked transparency in data disclosure. The pollution was linked to around 100,000 monthly cases of respiratory infections. Various task forces were formed, but policies were criticized as uncoordinated and reactive. The Supreme Court rejected the government's appeal against a citizen lawsuit demanding accountability and measures for air quality improvement, bringing hope for change. Experts urged coordinated efforts, data transparency, and a focus on reducing emissions from various sources.

[Bersih Indonesia: End-to-End Household Waste Management System Trials Start in Malang Regency](#)

—*AllianceToEndPlasticWaste*, 11 January 2024

The Malang Regency in Indonesia has launched the first phase of its "Clean Indonesia: Elimination of Plastic Waste" program, aimed at benefiting one million residents with improved waste management services. The initiative, a landmark public-private partnership supported by the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime and Investment Affairs and the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, aims to establish a self-sustaining and commercially viable waste management system. A key component involves the creation of a public utility, known as Badan Layanan Umum Daerah (BLUD), operated under the Regency's Environment Department. This system will be responsible for the extraction, separation, and sale of recyclable materials, including plastic, metal, glass, and paper, potentially creating a new revenue stream. The program targets the construction of two Material Recovery Facilities and two transfer stations over the next two years, creating local jobs and processing over 140,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste annually. A broader initiative—the H.E.B.A.T.S. program—will complement the program through strengthening waste management and recycling literacy in the population.

F. Investment and Finance

[Low Carbon Economy Through CCS, What Are Indonesia's Opportunities?](#)

—Aditya Putra Perdana, *Kompas*, 24 January 2024

Indonesia is exploring Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) as part of its low-carbon transition, with a presidential regulation soon to be issued to complement existing regulations in the oil and gas sector. The country has abundant CO₂ storage capacity, estimated at 400-600 gigatons in depleted reservoirs and saline aquifers. The government's forthcoming regulation will cover CCS implementation in saline aquifers outside the oil and gas working areas, encouraging cross-border CCS initiatives. Indonesia aims to be a regional hub and attract investments in CCS. BP's Tangguh Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage/CCUS project in Bintuni Bay, West Papua, and Pertamina's collaboration with ExxonMobil are prominent CCS developments. However, challenges include policy apparatus, funding, and safety considerations regarding potential leaks during the capture, transport, and storage process. The government is working on a comprehensive regulatory framework to address these challenges and promote safe CCS development.

[With LFP batteries all the rage, experts differ on future of nickel in EV industry](#)

—Deni Ghifari, *TheJakartaPost*, 24 January 2024

In a recent debate, candidate Gibran Rakabuming Raka defended the nickel policy and its impact on the country's role in the global electric vehicle industry. Gibran emphasized Indonesia's vast nickel reserves and accused rival candidate Muhaimin Iskandar's team of spreading misinformation about Tesla's batteries. The debate highlighted concerns about Indonesia's strategy, with experts suggesting that the government's nickel export ban may jeopardize the material's future in battery production. The policy has pushed companies to explore other alternatives, such as lithium iron phosphate (LFP), which does not contain nickel. While LFP batteries are gaining popularity, they have lower energy density, making them less practical for larger vehicles. Analysts have differing opinions on the future of nickel-based batteries in the industry, emphasizing the fast-changing landscape of battery technology and the potential for innovation. Some believe that regulatory missteps, such as the nickel export ban, have contributed to the rise of alternative technologies and may impact Indonesia's position in the Electric Vehicle market.

[Green economy a foundation for sustainable growth](#)

ANTARANewsAgency, 22 January 2024

—Azis Kurmala,

Indonesia introduced the Green Economy Index (GEI) with support from the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action as well as international development agency GIZ, WRI Indonesia, Low Carbon Development Initiative/LCDI, Global Green Growth Institute/GGGI, and United Nations Partnership for Action on Green Economy/PAGE. The GEI has 15 indicators across three pillars: environmental (controlled waste, renewable energy, reduced emissions, degraded peatlands, and land cover), social (life expectancy, unemployment, poverty, and average schooling), and economic (emission intensity, energy intensity, and GNI per capita). Integrated into national development plans, the GEI aims to achieve 6.1-6.5% annual economic growth by 2050, reduce emission intensity by 68% by 2045, and create 1.8 million green jobs by 2030. The government prioritizes a green economy as part of the Golden Indonesia vision from 2025 to 2045, focusing on clean energy, green transportation, and a circular economy.

[How Indonesia plans to increase electric vehicle uptake and become a regional manufacturing hub](#)

—Hellena Souisa and Sally Brooks, *ABCNews*, 15 January 2024

The Indonesian government is determined to boost electric vehicle (EV) adoption by providing incentives, such as tax breaks and subsidies, to make EVs more attractive to consumers and manufacturers. Initiatives include removing luxury sales tax, reducing value-added tax, offering a subsidy for electric motorcycles, and providing discounts on home charging for EV owners. Jakarta, the capital, has introduced special number plates for EVs, exempting them from road usage restrictions applicable to petrol-engine vehicles. In November 2023, Indonesia and Australia entered into a cooperative agreement for battery manufacturing and critical minerals processing. Despite China's dominance in EV manufacturing, Indonesia plans an ambitious production target of 600,000 EVs by 2030 (leveraging its vast nickel reserves for battery production) by offering various incentives, including tax holidays, to attract car manufacturers. China's Wuling and South Korea's Hyundai presently dominate Indonesia's EV market, with additional investments from other automakers expected for new EV plants in the country.

G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

[UN Security Council Fails to Act on Its Resolution: Indonesia on Gaza War](#)

—Jayanty Nada Shofa, *TheJakartaGlobe*, 24 January 2024

UN Security Council Fails to Act on Its Resolution: Indonesia on Gaza War Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Minister, Retno Marsudi, expressed disappointment at the UN Security Council during an open debate on the prolonged Gaza war. Marsudi urged the 15-member body not to tolerate the ongoing conflict in Gaza, emphasizing the increasing civilian casualties. She reminded the council of its mandate to maintain international peace and security, calling attention to the UN Charter's binding nature of Security Council resolutions. Despite numerous resolutions on Palestine, Israeli aggression persists, prompting Marsudi to question the effectiveness of these resolutions. She called for an end to the daily horrors faced by Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Marsudi, in a recorded press statement, criticized the lack of sanctions against offenders and highlighted the council's failure to act on its resolutions for decades. The UN Security Council, consisting of five permanent members and ten elected members, recently adopted a resolution demanding unhindered humanitarian aid delivery to Gaza. The Gaza health ministry reported a death toll exceeding 25,000 since the conflict escalated last October.

[CRI Says Indonesia's Nickel Industry Violates Human Rights, Harms Ecology](#)

—Riri Rahayu, *TempoEnglish*, 18 January 2024

A US based advocacy group Climate Rights International (CRI) released a report entitled "Nickel Unearthed," accusing Indonesia's nickel industry of violating human rights and causing severe environmental damage. The report focuses on the construction and operation of the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP) and nickel mining areas in Halmahera, North Maluku, claiming that they have adversely affected indigenous communities and rural residents. The report highlights deforestation, loss of carbon storage, air pollution, and land grabbing as adverse environmental and social impacts caused by the nickel industry. CRI urged the Indonesian government to prevent environmental damage and human rights abuses, especially to indigenous communities and other vulnerable groups. The report also calls on global automotive companies sourcing nickel from Indonesia, such as Tesla, Ford, and Volkswagen, to ensure their supply chains adhere to human rights and environmental standards.

[Indonesian palm oil firm fined for fires sues expert a second time over testimony](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 17 January 2024

Indonesian palm oil company PT Jatim Jaya Perkasa (JJP) is facing criticism for a second lawsuit against fire expert Bambang Hero Saharjo, who had previously testified against the company leading to a significant fine. JJP initially sued Bambang in 2018, dropped the case, and has now filed a new lawsuit, seeking US\$32 million, claiming false and exaggerated testimony. The company argues that Bambang's assessment of the fire damage led to an inflated fine. Environmental law experts denounce the lawsuit as an attempt to avoid responsibility and payment. Critics see it as a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP), a legal action meant to intimidate critics. Bambang insists that his assessments were based on scientific evidence and that the lawsuit is baseless. Environmental advocates fear such legal actions could undermine the credibility of experts and discourage them from testifying against companies involved in environmental crimes. Observers call for comprehensive anti-SLAPP regulations to protect experts and activists, urging the Indonesian government to strengthen legal measures against frivolous lawsuits. JJP has yet to pay the fines imposed for environmental damages.

[Hundreds Urge Govt for Human Rights Violations Resolution in 17-Year Commemoration of Kamisan Act](#)

—Novali Panji Nugroho, *TempoEnglish*, 18 January 2024

On Thursday, 18 January, hundreds marked the 17th anniversary of Kamisan Action by silently demanding the resolution of past human rights violations cases in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta. The peaceful protest by victims' families is called “Kamisan” because it happens religiously every Thursday. Participants, dressed in black, stood for 30 minutes, some covering their eyes and holding black umbrellas, with boards summarizing timelines of human rights tragedies. The event addressed incidents such as the Tanjung Priok Tragedy in 1989, the May Tragedy in 1998, and forced disappearances of activists in 1997-1998. Human rights organizations like Indonesia Corruption Watch and Amnesty International, along with families of victims, participated. Reflecting on the event, activists highlighted the need for justice in a country where legal integrity can be swayed by power and money.

I. RI General Elections

[Social Assistance, from State Aid to Politicization](#)

—M. Toto Suryaningtyas, *Kompas*, 23 January 2024

Social assistance programs, aimed at addressing economic difficulties and preventing social shocks, are becoming politically charged as the general election approaches. Social assistance, in the form of direct cash transfer or other, is intended as a means of government aid to vulnerable citizens so they can continue to live in a dignified manner. This social protection scheme was implemented during the 1998 economic crisis. At that time, the government implemented a social safety net policy through Food Security, Labor Intensive, Social Protection, and Small and Medium-sized Industry Development programs. The assistance in 2024, is often linked to electoral strategies, hence susceptible to manipulation. Instances of social assistance packages featuring images or messages of certain candidates have been reported, and legislative candidates have allegedly exploited programs like the Family Hope Program for political gain. The politicization raises concerns about influencing voters through state aid, highlighting the delicate balance between providing necessary aid and preventing misuse for political purposes. The susceptibility to fraud and corruption in the distribution of social assistance further complicates the issue.

[Dent in public hype over Indonesia VP candidate Gibran after 'rude' gesture against opponent in live debate](#)

—*ChannelNewsAsia*, 22 January 2024

The performance of vice-presidential candidate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is also the son of President Joko Widodo, is facing criticism for perceived rude behavior during a live debate. It was a stark contrast to the buzz generated by him last month. In the fourth of a series of five debates leading up to the presidential election on February 14, Gibran, running as the vice-presidential candidate alongside defense minister Prabowo Subianto, made a "ducking" gesture and pretended to search for a lost item in response to an answer given by rival Mahfud MD. The latter, who is much older and holds a top post in the current government, faced the gesture and was accused by Gibran of not addressing the issue of "greenflation" properly. Netizens criticized Gibran's actions as disrespectful and accused him

of trying too hard to be "savage," with social media analysis showing 60% negative sentiment toward his behavior. Gibran, previously not qualified to run due to age requirements, has faced controversy throughout his candidacy.

[Presidential Favorite in Indonesia Stirs Fears of 'Death of Democracy'](#)

—Sui-Lee Wee, Rin Hindryati and Hasya Nindita, *TheNewYorkTimes*, 21 January 2024

Presidential front-runner Prabowo Subianto, with a strongman background dating back to the dictatorship era, is causing concerns about the "death of democracy". Prabowo, accused of ordering kidnappings of pro-democracy activists and linked to atrocities during East Timor's military occupation, has spent two decades attempting democratic leadership. Current polls show the 72-year-old leading, raising alarms among Indonesians who fear a return to the brutal rule of Suharto, Prabowo's former father-in-law. Critics warn that his victory could mark the end of democracy in the country. Prabowo, the defense minister, downplays concerns about his track record but emphasizes the need for a strong military. His makeover includes portraying himself as a cute grandfather, distancing from a volatile image. While leading in polls, he might face a runoff, with critics highlighting his dark past and human rights record. Despite attempts to appeal to Indonesia's youth, many are unaware of his historical actions. Prabowo's rise is attributed to an alliance with the departing president's son, alarming those who see it as an attempt to maintain influence.

[Anies wants to make Ambon the capital of fisheries](#)

—News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 16 January 2024

Presidential candidate Anies Baswedan pledges to transform Ambon into Indonesia's fisheries industry capital, emphasizing Maluku's abundant potential for fisheries. During a campaign visit to Maluku, Anies proposed making Ambon the national center for fisheries trade, envisioning it as Indonesia's "supermarket." He reiterated plans to establish the National Fisheries Barn, a program aimed at strengthening Maluku and North Maluku as major fishery production centers. Anies also promised to empower small-scale coastal fishermen by ensuring affordable diesel supplies, constructing fish storage facilities, and facilitating access to loan programs. Acknowledging the long-awaited LIN program, initially proposed in 2010, Anies affirmed his commitment to its realization. He highlighted the need to tailor development plans for Maluku as an archipelago, emphasizing that past policies were often designed for land-based regions and might not be optimal for the island-based province. Anies visited Maluku as part of his campaign, addressing fishing communities and expressing his intention to prioritize the region's unique needs if elected president.

II. Indonesia in Geopolitics

[The online hate campaign turning Indonesians against Rohingya refugees](#)

—Rebecca Ratcliffe and Ardila Syakriah, *TheGuardian*, 18 January 2024

As Indonesia's presidential election approaches, a surge in disinformation against Rohingya refugees is spreading through social media. Rohingya refugees seeking refuge in Aceh province faced protests and hostility, with a coordinated online campaign contributing to the negative sentiments. The disinformation includes portraying Rohingya as ungrateful, resource-draining, and a danger to locals. Social media platforms like TikTok have seen false claims comparing Rohingya to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, labeling them as "parasites" and spreading rumors about their conduct. Human Rights Watch has urged the government to investigate and hold accountable those behind the campaign. UNHCR has

noted a shift in sentiments, with local residents protesting boat landings and calling for humanitarian groups to leave. The rise in disinformation has divided communities and escalated into larger protests against Rohingya arrivals. While concerns about security and resources persist, there is a call for clear information and budget allocation from Jakarta to address the issue. Indonesia is not a party to the 1951 Refugees Convention, but it has national laws on refugees, offering temporary protection. As the election approaches, the Rohingya issue remains a sensitive and divisive topic in Indonesia.

[Indonesia and Vietnam discuss South China sea and energy issues as Indonesian president visits](#)

—Aniruddha Ghosal, *AssociatedPress*, 12 January 2024

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo visited Hanoi for talks with Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong, focusing on maritime security in the disputed South China Sea, bilateral cooperation, and environmental issues. The meeting aimed to strengthen security and economic ties amid concerns about China's growing influence in the region. The leaders emphasized the need for stability in the South China Sea, and the two countries signed agreements on fisheries cooperation, information technology, and communications. Both nations defended territorial interests against China, with Indonesia expressing concerns about Beijing's encroachment on its exclusive economic zone. Trade between Indonesia and Vietnam reached US\$14.1 billion last year, with a target of US\$15 billion. The leaders also discussed cooperation in energy transition and the digital economy. The visit included an agreement on fishing industries, addressing potential territorial disputes. Both countries received support from the Group of Seven for a Just Energy Transition Partnership, with Vietnam leading in clean energy, while Indonesia plans to expand its electric vehicle industry.

End

We hope you enjoy reading our Indonesia Sustainable News Digest. If you no longer wish to receive this biweekly email, you can unsubscribe [here](#).