Environmentalism in Indonesian Politics

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Towards Integrated Environmental Law in Indonesia?

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Chapter 4. Environmentalism in Indonesian Politics

Robert Cribb

The modern environmental movement in global politics is a frustrating creature to analyse. Although clearly a powerful mobilising force, the ideology of environmentalism does not fit easily into any of the standard political doctrines of left, right or centre. In the 1960s, when Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (Carson 1962) ignited a new American environmentalist movement in the early 1960s, environmentalism appeared to be of the left, an enemy of and a reaction to capitalism, business and development. Since that time, however, historical research and practical experience have both greatly complicated the picture. Not only have we been reminded that the history of modern environmentalist movements begins about a century before Carson's book, in the early decades of the industrial era, but the malleability of environmentalist rhetoric has been demonstrated by studies of environmentalism in, for instance, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Weiner 1988; Dominick 1992; Pois 1986). More recently, the important work of Grove (Grove 1995) has not only added two more centuries to the pedigree of environmentalism but has also suggested that both environmental protection and ideas of development spring from the same intellectual notions of human progress.

For those interested in the politics of the environment, there are two tantalising questions to be addressed: How do political interests (as opposed to scientific considerations) influence the place of environmental issues on the political agenda? And conversely, how does the presence of environmental politics on the political agenda influence the broader political system? I would like to argue that the intrusion of environmental issues into Indonesian politics in the mid-1970s had a perceptible impact not just on the management of the environment but also on the conduct of Indonesian politics itself. Environmentalism, initially sponsored by the state, worked at first to reinforce the corporatist, authoritarian character of the New Order. Soon, however, dissenting groups in Indonesian society found in environmentalism a framework for criticism of the government, a framework all the more effective because of the government's espousal of environmental responsibility. The result was a brief era in which environmental issues created strange political alliances between forces that once seemed irreconcilable. These alliances contributed to the erosion of New Order corporatism and to a revival of official tolerance of a limited degree of political pluralism. In the process, however, the special utility of environmentalism to the New Order diminished, and official figures began to express active hostility to the environmental cause.

The Emergence of Modern Environmentalism in Indonesia

In the mid-1970s, Indonesia was ripe for an environmentalist transformation. The country had inherited from the Dutch colonial era a modest set of regulations for environmental protection, particularly in the area of nature reserves and wildlife protection (Boomgaard 1995), but there had been virtually no initiatives in this field since 1940. Regulations had not been expanded or updated, and were at best weakly enforced. At the same time clear signs of a coming environmental crisis were on the horizon: population growth had reduced Java's once-extensive primary forests to a few pockets at the eastern...
and western ends of the island and had brought the Java tiger to the brink of extinction.\textsuperscript{1} There were early signs of the dangers of industrial pollution in the rivers flowing through larger cities such as Jakarta. In 1975, moreover, a Japanese oil tanker grounded off Singapore and the resulting oil-spill highlighted the new risks which Indonesia would face as it and the world about it industrialised (Cribb 1990). At the same time, environmental protection was not only a matter of increasing global discussion, but Indonesia was coming under international pressure to include environmental matters in the monitoring and reporting of its affairs. These factors led to the appointment of a (State) Minister for the Environment in 1978 and the development of a series of legislative, regulatory and administrative measures during the 1980s and early 1990s which gave Indonesia both the legal framework and the technical capacity needed to begin serious protection of the environment (MacAndrews 1994b; Cribb forthcoming; Warren and Elston 1994).

Although there are signs that Indonesia's ruling circles initially dismissed environmental protection as a luxury that a developing nation could not afford, environmentalist arguments soon came to receive a sympathetic hearing. The Suharto government had prepared a plan for 25 years of accelerated modernisation (Moertopo 1974) and was receptive to the argument that neglect of the environment would store up problems in the long term. The regime also cherished an image of superlative technical economic expertise (though subsequent research has shown how ramshackle some of its operations were, especially in the early 1970s [Winters 1996]) and may have recognised in environmentalism a kindred spirit. One of the defining features of modern environmentalism is its reliance on an increasingly complicated and technical understanding of natural processes and systems. Whereas once, for instance, it could be assumed that the most important measure to protect a species from extinction was to prohibit people from killing it, the strategies for species preservation now rest on complex interrelationships between plants and animals, especially in their respective reproductive processes. Much of this knowledge is, like advanced economics, beyond the comprehension of the general public (or at least is allowed to stay beyond public comprehension). Ecological decisions, therefore, like economic ones, have removed themselves partly from the political sphere. The possibility that the New Order government could apply technical solutions to environmental problems in partial isolation from politics, as they had done in the economic sphere, was probably appealing. As we shall see, however, practical difficulties soon emerged in pursuing environmentalist goals, and we need to look further to account for the appeal of environmentalism to Indonesian officialdom.

In the mid-1970s, environmentalism became a useful element for the authoritarian New Order government of President Suharto in a major project to reshape Indonesian politics. For the first eight years or so after the removal of Indonesia's first President, Sukarno, from power in 1965–1966, Suharto's military-dominated regime had sought to do away with politics.\textsuperscript{2} The political parties that had competed for power since 1945 were banned or purged and reshaped, the activities of surviving political organisations were curtailed, and the government created a vacuum at the heart of the electoral system in the form of Golkar, an electoral vehicle which represented the government in the polls but which had virtually no existence between elections. The aim was to create an illusion of democracy.
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for audiences both inside and outside Indonesia, but one in which there was no possibility of non-government forces winning power or even setting the political agenda. Behind this illusion, the government intended to proceed with the tasks of national development. These tasks were widely recognised to be urgent: administrative disintegration under Sukarno's Guided Democracy (1959–1965) had exacerbated a legacy of neglect and destruction dating back to the Great Depression of the 1930s and had left Indonesia as one of the poorest countries in the world.

Thanks to careful management, sympathetic international donors and creditors, and a developing boom in oil and timber exports, the New Order achieved spectacular economic result even in the years immediately after the removal of Sukarno. The New Order leadership therefore enjoyed a sense of self-assurance in government circles that this performance had earned them at least the acquiescence of the Indonesian public in authoritarian rule, even if acquiescence fell short of unqualified approval. This self-assurance was deflated in January 1974 with the so-called Malari riots. The demonstrations were ostensibly against the visiting Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, but both the public and policy-makers saw them as a protest against the New Order itself. The demonstrators objected to Indonesia's new economic dependence on the West and Japan, to growing and ostentatious corruption amongst the ruling elite, and to the callousness with which the government treated the poor in general and the victims of development in particular. Many demonstrators were also sceptical about the depth of the New Order's economic achievements and followed the dependency school in seeing Indonesia as caught in an underdevelopment trap. They saw the current state of affairs as benefiting only a small elite and their disillusionment was summed up in the title of a widely read volume published in Australia called Showcase State: the illusion of Indonesia's 'Accelerated Modernisation' (Mortimer 1973).

Environmentalism and the Pancasila

The demonstrations were connected to rivalries within the New Order military elite, as well as to grievances against the system, but Saharto and his immediate circle drew far-reaching conclusions from them. Rather than relying only on performance and repression, Saharto now sought to construct alongside them an ideological basis for his regime. For this purpose, he used the Pancasila, a set of five principles formulated by Sukarno in July 1945 on the eve of independence to sum up the basic points on which the nationalist movement, otherwise deeply divided over what form independent Indonesia should take, could agree. The principles of belief in God, humanitarianism, nationalism, democracy and social justice were meant to be inclusive rather than exclusive at a moment when unity was of paramount importance, but the Pancasila slipped into relative unimportance after the Declaration of Independence in August 1945. It recovered significantly in the late 1950s, when national unity appeared once more to be at risk in a series of regional rebellions, though its inclusive tone was compromised by the difficult question of the relationship of the officially atheist communist party (PKI) to the first principle, belief in God. The party officially accepted the Pancasila, saying that it accepted belief in God as a social reality in Indonesia and implying that in power it would be tolerant of religious
belief. Few people on any part of the political spectrum, however, took this formulation as a sincere one. The communists clearly preferred Sukarno's other major ideological formulation, NASAKOM, in which communism was given equal standing with nationalism and religion as part of national philosophy. The Pancasila, therefore, increasingly became the rallying point of the PKI's enemies and the Suharto regime gave its political system the name Pancasila democracy above all to symbolise the exclusion of communism from the new political arrangements.

The New Order's use of the Pancasila after 1974, however, was an entirely different endeavour. The government now established a committee to give the Pancasila an active ideological content. Especially by reading each of the sila in the context of other sila, the committee was able to develop the Pancasila into an elaborate corporatist ideology. Members of society were now seen as deriving their importance from their function in society as bureaucrats, workers, peasants, soldiers, wives, mothers, children, students, fishermen and so on. Such ideas had formed a significant strand of thought within the Indonesian nationalist movement (Reeve 1983, esp. Chapter 1), but the New Order's elaboration of them was the most important attempt to turn such ideas into a blueprint for daily life. The Pancasila now emphasised a disciplined division of labour between different sections of society, meaning that it was not the place of those out of power to question or challenge government decisions; at any level of society, since people should work for the national interest.

Environmentalism found fertile ground in this ideological terrain. Especially in the 1970s, when the latest wave of environmentalism was a relatively young movement, the ideas of Garrett Hardin on the 'tragedy of the commons' were highly influential. Hardin argued that an environment which belonged to no-one and to everyone ('the commons') would be exploited by everyone to his or her own maximum advantage. The result would be the destruction of what had once been a shared resource (Hardin 1968). Environmentalist arguments therefore reinforced the New Order's claims to technical competence to make decisions for the general good with powerful arguments that the regime also enjoyed the moral competence to do so. In short, environmentalism seemed to support the arguments for curtailing democracy in Indonesia.

Several features of New Order policy sprang wholly or partly out of this philosophical orientation. In the view of the Indonesian government of the mid-1970s, the greatest threat to Indonesia's environment came from its people in the form of uncontrolled encroachment into forest areas. This encroachment took the form of expanding agricultural settlement from the lowlands into upland regions, especially on Java and Sumatra, the activities of swidden (slash-and-burn) farmers in the upland regions of Kalimantan and other islands, and the intrusion of local people into forests everywhere to cut timber for fencing, furniture and firewood, to collect other forest products such as resins and rattan for personal use or for sale, and to hunt wild animals. Authorities believed that the cutting and clearing of forests on hillsides, whether by settlers from the lowlands or traditional swidden farmers, was likely to increase runoff and thus to increase the likelihood of floods further downstream, especially in rivers running through centres of population. Furthermore, it was believed that cutting down forests led to an overall reduction in rain-

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... the twin evils of drought and flood. The idea of a connection between forest cover and climate, and between forest cover and flooding, was one of the first elements of what would now be called environmental analysis to be accepted as truth in government circles in the colonial era, and the first form of nature reserve to be created in the Netherlands East Indies consisted of forest reserves created specifically to protect watersheds. The issue of protecting soils from erosion was the only environmental topic raised in the public discussions that surrounded the drafting of Indonesia's Constitution in early 1945 (Van Klinken 1996). Still more important, in the early 1960s, environmental arguments had been used by government officials to resist PKI attempts to have forest land distributed to landless peasant farmers within the broad framework of Indonesia's abortive land reform programme. In parts of West Java, peasants did indeed move into state teak forests and clear the ground for agriculture. The communists were subsequently blamed for floods afflicting the Indramayu area a few years later.

With the fervour of new converts, the Indonesian government quickly became convinced that the only way to preserve the important areas of surviving forest cover was as far as possible to exclude people from forest areas. In reaching this conclusion, they appear to have been influenced both by Western ideas of the tropical rainforest as a pristine but fragile environment, and by the strong image of the jungle (alas) held by a number of western Indonesian cultures (including those of the numerically preponderant Javanese) as remote, dangerous and essentially alien to the life of civilised humanity. The first dramatic result of Indonesia's conversion to environmentalism therefore was the creation of a series of national parks, most of them covering a large area and all of them governed by strict rules which largely excluded local people from access for hunting or cutting and which limited naturalist visitors to narrow corridors and defined visitor areas. The first parks were declared in 1980 and by the end of the decade Indonesia had some 19 national parks covering 11.9 million hectares, or just over 6 per cent of Indonesia's land area (Cribb 1988: 14-15; MacAndrews 1998). Less well publicised was the designation of forest reserves, also covering large areas, in which wildlife was not formally protected but in which cutting by local people was prohibited. These reserves, more than the national parks, impinged on the way of life of swidden farmers, already the object of some government suspicion. Since colonial times successive regimes had been uneasy with the presence of shifting cultivators, especially along Indonesia's poorly marked borders with the northern Borneo states (now East Malaysia) and eastern New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea), seeing them as a likely source of border trouble and, because their loyalties evidently straddled international boundaries, as being of doubtful loyalty. Swiddeners are also widely blamed for the creation of so-called 'green deserts', large areas of *alang-alang* grass (*imperata cylindrica*), which can become the climax vegetation when tropical rainforest is cleared extensively and repeated fires prevent forest regrowth.

Environmental awareness also reinforced the New Order's determination to tackle what it saw as the population problem. Although official support for family planning was well established in 1970, before any perceptible attention was given to other environmental issues, it is significant that from 1978 the environment was linked directly to population...
questions with the creation of a State Ministry of Population and the Environment. Although this is not the place to examine Indonesia's family planning policies in detail, the programme was based on assumptions similar to those underlying the forest protection measures. These were that the basic problems were an abundance of people and their pursuit of short-term individual interest, whether these lay in cutting forests or in producing more than two children. In both cases, in the view of the government, the interests of society had to be placed first and people had to be prevented, as gently as possible, from harming their own future. In the case of family planning, Indonesian families — in practice Indonesian wives — had to be persuaded or cajoled into becoming 'acceptors'. Indonesia's family planning programme has been virtually without the instances of forced sterilisation, late abortion and draconian public penalties for large families reported at times from China and India, but intense social pressure was often applied to women to participate.

The programme to create wilderness parks in those parts of the archipelago not yet overwhelmed by population growth also meshed with the New Order's complicated cultural policies. The idea of Indonesia had emerged in the early twentieth century very much as a vehicle for bringing modernity to the diverse peoples of the archipelago. Disagreement on just what modernity meant was one of the elements in the political turmoil of the first 20 years after independence. However, one widely held view, which became dominant in government circles under the New Order, was that modernisation included the raising of 'primitive' peoples to higher standards of civilisation. Even in the 1950s and 1960s, most Indonesians took exception to what they saw as Dutch plans to turn the inhabitants of West New Guinea into exhibits in a living museum by protecting and preserving indigenous New Guinean cultures. 'Civilising' primitive peoples has included not only changing their religious beliefs and modifying their dress (or lack of dress) but also transforming their economies. The Indonesian government has maintained a consistent policy of encouraging forest peoples to leave the jungles and settle down, preferably as wet-rice farmers on the Javanese model. Moreover, despite abundant and increasing evidence of the ways in which apparently settled agricultural communities construct economies which integrate forest-based activities with more conventional agriculture, the authorities have been reluctant to recognise the many ways in which the livelihood of people living close to the forests is intertwined with forest ecosystems.

Although the New Order used environmentalism as a weapon against some elements of traditional culture, it also endeavoured to recruit a cultural peddler to its environmentalist campaign. From the early 1980s, the President awarded the Kalpataru prize to individuals and organisations that had taken praiseworthy initiatives in the environmental field. The prize was named after the kalpataru tree, or 'tree of wishes' of Hindu-Javanese mythology, a bountiful source of good things for humankind (Aichele 1928). It was chosen to show that traditional Indonesian culture shared with modern science an awareness that human prosperity depends on the natural environment. Related efforts were made to use the traditional shadow puppet play of Java (song yang kulit) as a sympathetic vehicle for environmentalist ideas (Schuring 1987). This affirmation of the percutiveness of traditional belief, or at least of traditional high Javanese belief, also worked to validate other elements' alleged features of traditional belief, notably submission to the authority of the rulers.
The Limits of Government Policy

In the early days of Indonesia’s environmental awakening, much could be done that was clearly necessary and uncontroversial. Once, however, environmental yardsticks came to be applied to measure the government’s performance, serious shortcomings became apparent. Under the New Order, Indonesia’s most important export after oil was timber. Not only was logging a significant source of foreign exchange and government income, but it was a highly lucrative business for the New Order elite. Unlike oil drilling, which required high levels of expertise and capital investment, the timber industry presented few barriers to entry. The standard pattern came to be that Indonesians associated with the New Order regime entered joint-venture arrangements with foreign logging companies. In most cases the Indonesians brought only their government connections to the partnership, the foreign partner providing all the capital and expertise, while profits were shared. The arrangement thus allowed the government to reward its supporters at no direct cost. The government also valued the industry because it provided jobs and, to some extent, infrastructure and technical training in outlying provinces which had often felt neglected by the central government. Logging permits for the most part included provisions designed to minimize environmental damage. Specifically, logging in areas over 500 metres above sea level was prohibited and logging firms were obliged to undertake a programme of selective logging on a long cycle, generally 35 years. Had these requirements been observed, they would have considerably diminished the environmentally damaging consequences of the logging industry, but they would also have dramatically decreased its scale. Although the 500 metre limit was accorded some respect, I am aware of no reported instances where logging firms consistently adhered faithfully to the provisions for selective, cyclical logging.

Environmentalist misgivings, moreover, increasingly arose over Indonesia’s transmigration programme. The movement of large numbers of people from Java and Bali to other less densely populated islands was as central to the New Order’s social engineering plans as its family planning policies. It promised both a reduction in the population pressure on Java and Bali and a transfer of Javanese and Balinese skills in wet-rice agriculture to other regions where, it was hoped, local people would quickly learn from the Javanese example. Problems, however, quickly emerged, especially as the programme grew in scope. In particular, many of the sites chosen for transmigration settlements proved to be unsuitable. Lush rainforest was cleared and new villages were established, but the transmigration planners took insufficient account of the ecological characteristics of tropical rainforest in non-volcanic regions. Accustomed to the deep volcanic soils of Java and Bali, they did not appreciate that the jungle often subsisted on a thin layer of humus above an infertile subsoil of leached laterite. Once the forest was removed and the intensive farming techniques of the Javanese were introduced, the soil often became exhausted after a few seasons and the settlement had to be abandoned, leaving behind a barren wasteland of alang-alang. Even the New Order’s much-vaulted programme of agricultural development within the framework of the Green Revolution appeared to have serious shortcomings. Although the use of new high-yielding varieties of rice and the intensive application of fertiliser, pesti-
cides and machinery had delivered an impressive increase in productivity, serious environmental problems had emerged. The high-yielding varieties could be cropped more frequently and so there was no longer a fallow period during which time the insect pests of the rice plants could not feed. The use of pesticides not only destroyed the benevolent insects of the Javanese countryside, such as bees, but it also killed birds and fish, leaving the rice crops vulnerable to the emergence of pesticide-resistant insects. A consequence was an increasingly serious problem of a plague of brown leaf-hoppers which not only ate the leaves of the rice plant but transmitted a viral disease causing further destruction. In the mid-1980s there appeared to be a risk that the gains of the Green Revolution would be lost to the leaf-hopper. Evidence began to increase, too, that farmers were falling ill as a result of overexposure to pesticides, and there were even signs that both pesticides and fertilisers were beginning to damage the health of consumers.

Yet another problem emerged in the form of growing industrial pollution, which was a direct consequence of the industrialisation promoted by the New Order. Industrial effluent poured without check into the major rivers of Indonesia, damaging not only riverine fisheries but also the health of people living on or close to the water. Other factories put dangerous pollutants into the air, and the growing number of vehicles on Indonesia’s roads added to the problem.¹²

Each of these aspects of Indonesian policy was vulnerable to criticism on purely environmental grounds, but environmental criticism also became a vehicle for more wide-ranging objections to New Order policy. Critics objected not just to the destruction of the forests, but to the fact that the benefits of forest exploitation appeared to be going to cronies of the ruling elite and to foreign enterprises. These of course were precisely the criticisms levelled against the New Order which had underpinned the Malari riots. Other critics noted the callous destruction of the ways of life and cultures of forest peoples as a result of logging. Because of the environmental problems it raised, the transmigration programme could easily be criticised also for its authoritarian, manipulative style, in a way that the family planning programme, whose utility was not widely doubted, could not.

The shortcomings of the Green Revolution stood for the New Order’s more general reliance on narrowly technical solutions and its willingness to let people suffer in the name of a development process from which they appeared to derive only limited benefits. The pollution issue seemed to reflect the same willingness to allow the rich to profit at the expense of the poor.

The sharp, political edge of all these criticisms, however, was blunted by the fact that they were delivered within the environmentalist framework which the Indonesian government had so closely espoused. This had two consequences. First, the government responded with a serious attempt to achieve a better performance in each of the areas where concerns had arisen. In the management of national parks, a carefully thought-out programme was introduced to create within and around the reserves buffer-zones where local people could hunt and collect forest products but which kept most human activity at some distance from the core conservation areas (Buku Informasi Taman Nasional Indonesia 1987). The Forestry Ministry also called on international expertise to develop models for so-called social forestry, in which communities could be based in the forest and allowed to earn
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their livelihood from the forest, while at the same time protecting it from activities that might be more destructive. During the 1980s, moreover, the Indonesian government gradually imposed a ban on the export of untreated logs. The measure was partly designed to force producers to process timber within Indonesia and thus to give Indonesia value-added benefits, but the move was also made in recognition of the growing value of tropical timber as a disappearing resource. Still more important, in the late 1980s, the government at last began to police the activities of logging firms, requiring them finally to live up to the terms of their permits and to log selectively or to replant, according to circumstance. This supervision was undertaken unevenly — logging interests close to the regime remain relatively unscathed — but at least action was finally being taken.

Progress was achieved, too, in agriculture. In 1986, after considering a variety of expert reports, the President himself banned the use of 57 varieties of pesticide in rice fields and announced the introduction of a new programme of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). By using less pesticide, the government aimed to encourage benign predators of the enemies of rice to return. In addition, the government promoted the planting of other crops between the rice crops in order to break the life-cycle of damaging insects, and encouraged some return to older and more robust, though less productive, rice varieties. The programme was remarkably successful in reducing the major environmental problems first produced by the Green Revolution.15

Pollution also received serious attention. After careful planning by the Environment Ministry, regulations on the environmental impact of industry were introduced in 1986, followed by laws that came into full effect in 1992, after a period of grace allowing the owners of industry to meet legal standards.14 Even the transmigration programme was made a little more responsive to environmental concerns, mainly by a gradual reorientation of the programme from attempting to keep pace with the rate of population increase on Java and Bali to creating durable settlements in other regions.

Political Renewal, Political Marginalisation

The handling of environmental issues both by the government and by dissenting groups created a refreshing element of dialogue in Indonesian politics. This is not at all to say that the government abandoned its repressive apparatus or discarded the corporatist elements of Pancasila. Rather, the earlier insistence of the government that it alone held the answer to the country's problems, and its deep suspicion of any kind of popular mobilisation that was not under its own control, gave way to a willingness to envisage a kind of partnership between government and people, at least in some fields. This development was most pronounced in the environmental sphere, where first dozens and then hundreds of non-governmental organisations emerged. The appearance of these organisations was itself remarkable. During the first two decades of the New Order, the government had put unremitting effort into destroying independent social organisations. In many fields of social life, only government-controlled organisations were permitted, and in 1985 all organisations except business firms were required to adopt the Pancasila as their sole basic principle. From the late 1980s, however, the government increasingly tolerated the emergence of NGOs within a quasi-commercial framework, requiring only that they did not
become so-called mass organisations by inviting the public to join as members (Eldridge 1995; Ibrahim 1996; Colombijn 1998). The Indonesian Environmental Forum WALHI, in particular, became very close to the Environment Minister Emil Salim, providing a conduit for ideas and initiative in both directions.

The success of this dialogue fed both a hunger amongst the growing new Indonesian middle class for greater participation in the political process and a growing willingness on the part of the government to tolerate a more politically active civil society. During the late 1980s and early 1990s there was increasing talk in Indonesian political circles of openness (keterbukaan, a direct translation of glasnost) and corresponding signs that the government was moving from the Pancasila model of constraining corporatist orthodoxy to a more pluralist model in which it would gain its legitimacy by balancing a wide variety of political forces. However, this shift was uneven and was punctuated by reverses such as the banning of three leading news magazines in 1994. During the closing years of the Suharto regime (1994-1998), the ideological insistence on the Pancasila remained subdued, but the government seemed to renew its effort to control and manipulate social and political forces.

For the environmentalist cause, however, this political sea-change marked by keterbukaan was a mixed blessing. To the extent that response to and anticipation of public opinion returned significantly to the repertoire of the New Order government, better channels opened for environmental issues to be transmitted from society as a whole to the administration. On the other hand, with the retreat of the Pancasila, the special significance which environmentalism was able to win as one of the few external doctrines compatible with the Pancasila diminished. The government had less need, for instance, to emphasise its technical expertise and more interest in developing its reputation as a capable political manager. The retreat of environmentalism was hastened, too, by technical developments in environmental science, which have undermined some of the easy affinities that once appeared to exist between Pancasila and environmental awareness. The growing ecological inclination to accept, for instance, human beings as a long-established element in what were once thought of as pristine wildernesses, removed the coincidence between the environmentalist programme and the New Order's Pancasila-based hostility to forest-dwellers.

More broadly, student and other groups hostile to the authoritarianism and corruption of the New Order were increasingly attracted to environmental issues as a tool for criticising the Suharto government and for marshalling domestic and international support. Because environmental issues carried a kind of qualified privilege in the otherwise deeply restrictive political order of the Suharto era, they could be used to raise awareness of issues that might otherwise have been completely excluded from discussion. Thus, criticism of logging policy, for instance, although beginning from purely environmental grounds, could easily extend into criticism of the system of patronage and protection which surrounded the issue of logging permits and the policing of forest regulations. Environmental arguments likewise could defend the position of the forest dwellers being displaced by logging operations.

Environmental protection also became the rubric under which activists fought against factories that polluted or otherwise damaged the environment, and against the confiscation of land and resources.
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...tion of land for industrial projects, golf courses and dams. Although many such projects could indeed be criticised on purely environmental grounds, they were often more objectionable for their lack of respect for human rights. One celebrated case was the Kedung Ombo dam in Central Java, built to supply irrigation water to neighbouring dry areas and to provide hydro-electricity for urban and industrial development. Although the dam could be criticised on a straightforward environmental basis, the project’s greatest offence was its displacement of peasant farmers for meagre compensation (Laporan Kasus / Cases Report 1991). Although the dam was eventually constructed, a sustained campaign by NGOs, including pressure on the World Bank which had provided funding for the dam, eventually led to improved compensation for the farmers, and it certainly encouraged the New Order to be more careful on other dam issues. The price of such campaigns, however, was that environmental arguments increasingly aligned with the opposition rather than the government, and even when the scientific issues were relatively simple, environmental arguments were increasingly likely to receive an unsympathetic hearing from the government.

The growing alienation between government and environmentalists is perhaps symbolised most graphically by the experiences of the activist George Aditjondro, who was a recipient of the Kalpataru prize from Suharto in the early 1980s but was condemned vituperatively by a senior military figure as a crypto-communist in the mid-1990s. The officer went further in arguing that the environmentalism had become a cloak for a new generation of secret but none the less dangerous communist activists. As the New Order drew to a close, therefore, Indonesian politics came closer to what has become the more common global model, in which environmental concerns are espoused primarily by those towards the left of the political spectrum. Perhaps the final signal of the New Order’s estrangement from environmental issues was the outbreak of vast forest fires, especially in Kalimantan and Sumatra in 1997. The fires came at a time of drought, but they appear to have been principally a consequence of unchecked clearing of re-growth forest for new rubber and palm oil plantations. The smoke, which spread over Singapore and much of Malaysia was so thick visibility in some towns was reduced to a few metres, that hundreds of scheduled commercial flights were cancelled and hundreds of thousands of people suffered respiratory problems. The Suharto government, however, was slow and ineffective in its reaction, perhaps partly because many of the new plantations were linked to the Jakarta elite. Suharto’s decision to appoint the timber baron Bob Hasan as Minister for Trade in his last ineffective Cabinet seemed to confirm that the New Order had run out of environmentalist steam.

After Suharto’s fall in 1998, however, environmental issues failed to recover a significant place on the political agenda. Although businesses linked with the Suharto family lost their political protection, the authorities put priority on economic recovery from the economic crisis which began in 1997 and which precipitated Suharto’s fall. As a result, pollution regulations have not been implemented energetically. As part of the economic reform package imposed by the IMF as a condition for financial assistance, Indonesia introduced important reforms in the forestry sector. These reforms includes raising the value of logs by increasing government charges and by lifting the ban on the export of unprocessed logs. The latter measure opened the internal Indonesian market to interna-
ional buyers and was expected to increase the price of individual logs, thereby increasing the incentive to manage forests responsibly. In practice, however, the measure increased the incentive to cut trees for sale on the international market without regard for long-term sustainability. In the absence of effective policing, large areas of forest which were protected under the New Order — including major national parks — were cleared in illegal and semi-legal operations, often conducted under the auspices of local civil and military authorities.

The forces that devastated Indonesia’s forests after the fall of Suharto were not new. Rather, they had been kept in partly check for much of the preceding three decades by the New Order itself. Purely environmental considerations, however, had played only a subsidiary role in the regime’s attention to environmental issues. All the significant steps in environmental protection had taken place because they could be made a part of the New Order’s broader political agenda. In many respects the positive environmental achievements of Suharto’s New Order were a direct consequence of its authoritarian structure. With the collapse of New Order authoritarianism, the political context for sustained environmental protection also disappeared.