

As Indonesia cuts forests, fake nature thrives

By Dita Alangkara
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Indonesia’s capital is lush with fake greenery even as the country is cutting down its precious tropical forests at a record rate.

Jakarta’s gleaming air-conditioned malls have a particular fondness for lifeless extravaganzas of plastic ferns or autumnal trees that don’t drop any leaves.

Construction sites are wrapped in screens printed with giant leaves glistening with dew drops or the picturesque deciduous forests found in temperate climates. A new terminal at the international airport has a mini-jungle within its cavernous air-conditioned interior. Despite the odd inclusion of fake grass, it has the slight saving grace that the potted greenery is real.

It’s not that Jakarta lacks real trees. The presidential palace has well-manicured surrounds of parks, verges, and trees. But elsewhere, against the backdrop of unrelenting traffic and brutalist concrete, the greens often seem weirdly out of place, like an introduced alien species.

“Shuttling between air-conditioned high rises decorated with a simulacrum of nature, it’s easy to ignore the impact on climate and communities of relentless forest destruction taking place far away,” said Greenpeace Indonesia campaigner



FAKE GREENERY. Guests sit under an artificial tree during a wedding party in Jakarta, Indonesia. One of the strange sights in Indonesia, an ecologically rich archipelago of more than 13,000 islands, is its capital’s fondness for fake greenery at a time when the country is known for cutting down its precious tropical forests at a record rate. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

well?”
The fake nature is a piece of our world today. We live in an age when it’s sometimes increasingly difficult to discern the fake and the real.

Artificial flavorings. Perfectly photo-shopped selfies to eliminate blemishes and extra weight. Sophisticated simulations of famous buildings in cities across the world — like the skyscrapers of New York dotting the casinos of Las Vegas.

In Japan, there’s an entire street that sells plastic food meticulously designed to make potential restaurant-goers’ mouths water. In some well-to-do gated communities in the United States, gardens are full of fake flowers carefully drizzled with transparent glue so they look as if they’ve been freshly rained upon.

And then there’s fake news, of course — the latest expression of something synthetic that has people talking and arguing over its very definition.

It makes sense, though, that fake nature would assert itself, just as real nature does, in the in-between spaces of Jakarta. Human beings are inclined to simulate what they can’t have.

Yuyun Indradi.

Indonesia’s most densely populated island, Java, is nearly completely denuded of its original virgin forest and Sumatra is nearly as bare. Palm oil and pulp wood plantation companies are now making inroads into the great forests of Borneo and Papua.

The draining of tropical wetlands for industrial plantations has also come at a significant human cost. Record dry season fires in Sumatra and Borneo in 2015

hastened 100,000 deaths in the region from air pollution, according to a Harvard and Columbia study, and by World Bank estimates cost Indonesia’s economy \$16 billion.

“Perhaps when our children grow up, fake trees may help them reflect on how badly we need to protect that which is authentic and can’t simply be purchased in a mall,” said Indradi. “Or will they decide that the more comfortable, accessible, and colorful fake version will do them just as

In cold blow to U.S., Japan ups tariffs on frozen beef imports

By Elaine Kurtenbach
AP Business Writer

TOKYO — In unwelcome news for American farmers, Japan said it is imposing emergency tariffs of 50 percent on imports of frozen beef, mainly from the U.S.

Finance minister Taro Aso announced the move, saying he was prepared to explain the decision to the U.S. side.

“The tariff will take effect automatically as the volume of the imported U.S. frozen beef exceeded the quota set by law,” Aso said, “So this is what has to be done.”

Japan’s beef farmers are famed for their luscious marbled Kobe beef and other delicacies, and the government has long used tariffs and other measures to protect its farmers from foreign competition. Still, prices for imported beef tend to be half or less than those of beef from domestically raised cattle.

The U.S. and Australia account for 90 percent of all imports of frozen beef, which is mostly used by beef bowl, hamburger, and other fast-food outlets.

The usual tariff rate for frozen beef imports is 38.5 percent. Under World Trade Organization rules, Japan can introduce safeguard tariffs when imports rise more than 17 percent year-on-year in any given quarter.

U.S. farmers had been hoping for wider access to Japan’s lucrative market through a Pacific Rim trade initiative, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). But U.S.

President Donald Trump withdrew from that accord after taking office.

Trade terms Japan negotiated with the 10 other remaining members of the TPP remain in force. So Australia, the biggest rival to U.S. beef exporters with a more favorable tariff rate of 27.5 percent for frozen beef, will not face the same jump in tariff rates thanks to a free trade agreement reached with Tokyo as part of the TPP talks.

Relatively affordable “Aussie beef” is an increasingly popular feature of most supermarket meat sections, with Australia supplying more than half, about 55 percent, of all frozen beef imported to Japan.

According to figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. supplies around 35 percent, though U.S. beef exports to Japan have risen recently as prices fell after the livestock sector recovered from years of drought.

The Finance Ministry reported 89,253 metric tons of frozen beef were imported so far this year.

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