

Elephants dying from eating plastic waste in Sri Lankan dump

By Achala Pussalla

The Associated Press

PALLAKKADU, Sri Lanka — Conservationists and veterinarians are warning that plastic waste in an open landfill in eastern Sri Lanka is killing elephants in the region, after two more were found dead in mid-January.

Around 20 elephants have died over the last eight years after consuming plastic trash in the dump in Pallakkadu village in Ampara district, about 130 miles east of the capital, Colombo.

Examinations of the dead animals showed they had swallowed large amounts of nondegradable plastic that is found in the garbage dump, wildlife veterinarian Nihal Pushpakumara said.

“Polythene, food wrappers, plastic, other non-digestibles, and water were the only things we could see in the post mortems. The normal food that elephants eat and digest was not evident,” he said.

Elephants are revered in Sri Lanka but are also endangered. Their numbers have dwindled from about 14,000 in the 19th century to 6,000 in 2011, according to the country’s first elephant census.

They are increasingly vulnerable because of the loss and degradation of their natural habitat. Many venture closer to



human settlements in search of food, and some are killed by poachers or farmers angry over damage to their crops.

Hungry elephants seek out the waste in the landfill, consuming plastic as well as sharp objects that damage their digestive systems, Pushpakumara said.

“The elephants then stop eating and become too weak to keep their heavy frames upright. When that happens, they can’t consume food or water, which quickens their death,” he said.

In 2017, the government announced that it will recycle the garbage in dumps near wildlife zones to prevent elephants

from consuming plastic waste. It also said electric fences would be erected around the sites to keep the animals away. But neither has been fully implemented.

There are 54 waste dumps in wildlife zones around the country, with around 300 elephants roaming near them, according to officials.

The waste management site in Pallakkadu village was set up in 2008 with aid from the European Union. Garbage collected from nine nearby villages is being dumped there but is not being recycled.

In 2014, the electric fence protecting the site was struck by lightning and

PERILOUS PLASTIC. Wild elephants scavenge for food at an open landfill in Pallakkadu village in the Ampara district, about 130 miles east of the capital of Colombo in Sri Lanka, on January 6, 2022. Conservationists and veterinarians are warning that plastic waste in the open landfill in eastern Sri Lanka is killing elephants in the region. Around 20 elephants have died over the last eight years after consuming plastic trash in the dump. Examinations of the dead animals showed they had swallowed large amounts of nondegradable plastic that is found in the garbage dump, wildlife veterinarian Nihal Pushpakumara said. (AP Photo/Achala Pussalla)

authorities never repaired it, allowing elephants to enter and rummage through the dump. Residents say elephants have moved closer and settled near the waste pit, sparking fear among nearby villagers.

Many use firecrackers to chase the animals away when they wander into the village, and some have erected electric fences around their homes.

But the villagers often don’t know how to install the electric fences so they are safe and “could endanger their own lives as well as those of the elephants,” said Keerthi Ranasinghe, a local village councillor.

“Even though we call them a menace, wild elephants are also a resource. Authorities need to come up with a way to protect both human lives and the elephants that also allows us to continue our agricultural activities,” he said.

Map helps Chinese man reunite with his family after decades

Continued from page 2

“When she mentioned the scar, I knew it was her,” Li said.

Other details and recollections fell into place, and a DNA test confirmed his heritage. In an emotional reunion on New Year’s Day, he saw his mother for the first time since he was 4.

As Li walked toward her, he collapsed on the ground in emotion. Lifted up by his younger brother and sister, he finally hugged his mother.

Li choked up when speaking about his father, who has passed away. Now the father of two teenage children, Li said he would take his family to visit his father’s grave with all his aunts and uncles during Lunar New Year celebrations.

“It’s going to be a real big reunion,” Li said in January. “I want to tell him that his son is back.”

Associated Press video producer Liu Zheng contributed to this report.

Game maker Nintendo’s profits hurt by chips crunch

By Yuri Kageyama

The Associated Press

TOKYO — Nintendo’s profit for the nine months through December slipped 2.5%, as shortages of computer chips hurt production, the Japanese video game maker behind the Super Mario and Pokémon franchises has said.

Kyoto-based Nintendo Co. recorded a 367 billion yen (\$3.2 billion) profit for the period, down from 377 billion yen the previous year. Its sales in the same period fell 6% to 1.3 trillion yen (\$11 billion).

Game makers have reaped windfall profits from more people staying home during the pandemic. But sales of Nintendo Switch consoles had more momentum in the previous fiscal year, driven by its hit “Animal Crossing: New Horizons.”

Console sales are often driven by hit games, although the devices tend to sell better early on and then slowly decline in popularity.

Nintendo cut its forecast for Switch console sales for the fiscal year through March to 23 million machines. It had forecast 24 million units, previously slashed from a projection of 25.5 million units.

President Shuntaro Furukawa has said

Continued on page 17

Indonesia’s capital is sinking, polluted, and now moving

By Edna Tarigan and Niniek Karmini

The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Jakarta is congested, polluted, prone to earthquakes, and rapidly sinking into the Java Sea. Now the government is leaving, and moving the country’s capital to the island of Borneo.

President Joko Widodo envisions the construction of a new capital as a panacea for the problems plaguing Jakarta, reducing its population while allowing the country to start fresh with a “sustainable city” that has good public transportation, is integrated with its natural environment, and is in an area that’s not prone to natural disasters.

“The construction of the new capital city is not merely a physical move of government offices,” Widodo said ahead of parliament’s approval of the plan. “The main goal is to build a smart new city, a new city that is competitive at the global level, to build a new locomotive for the transformation ... toward an Indonesia based on innovation and technology based on a green economy.”

Skeptics worry, however, about the environmental impact of plunking a sprawling 990 square mile city down in Borneo’s East Kalimantan province, which is home to orangutans, leopards, and a wide array of other wildlife, as well as committing \$34 billion to the ambitious project amid a global pandemic.

“The new capital city’s strategic environmental study shows that there are at least three basic problems,” said Dwi Sawung, an official with the WALHI environmental group.

“There are threats to water systems and risks of climate change, threats to flora and fauna, and threats of pollution and environmental damage,” she said.

First proposed in 2019, Widodo’s plan to establish the city of Nusantara — an old Javanese term meaning “archipelago” — will entail constructing government buildings and housing from scratch. Initial estimates were that some 1.5 million civil servants would be relocated to the city, some 2,000 kilometers northeast of Jakarta, though ministries and government agencies are still working to finalize that number.

It will be located in the vicinity of Balikpapan, an East Kalimantan seaport with a population of about 700,000.



CAPITAL CRISIS. A young boy plays as high-rise buildings in the main business district are seen in the background, in Jakarta, Indonesia, on January 25, 2022. Jakarta is congested, polluted, prone to earthquakes, and rapidly sinking into the Java Sea. Now the government is leaving, and moving the country’s capital to the island of Borneo. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

Indonesia is an archipelago nation of more than 17,000 islands, but currently 54% of the country’s more than 270 million people live on Java, the country’s most densely populated island and where Jakarta is located.

Jakarta itself is home to about 10 million people and three times that number in the greater metropolitan area.

It has been described as the world’s most rapidly sinking city, and at the current rate, it is estimated that one-third of the city could be submerged by 2050. The main cause is uncontrolled ground water extraction, but it has been exacerbated by the rising Java Sea due to climate change.

Beyond that, its air and ground water are heavily polluted, it floods regularly, and its streets are so clogged that it is estimated congestion costs the economy \$4.5 billion a year.

In constructing a purpose-built capital, Indonesia will be taking a path that others have in the past, including Pakistan, Brazil, and Myanmar.

The committee overseeing the construction is led by Abu Dhabi’s crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan — no stranger to ambitious building projects at home in the United Arab Emirates — and also includes Masayoshi Son, the billionaire founder and chief executive of Japanese holding company SoftBank, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who currently runs the Tony Blair Institute for Global

Change.

State funds will pay for 19% of the project, with the rest coming from cooperation between government and business entities and from direct investment by state-run companies and the private sector.

Public Works and Housing minister Basuki Hadimuljono said initial planning had been carried out by clearing 138,800 acres of land to build the presidential palace, the national parliament, and government offices, as well as roads linking the capital to other cities in East Kalimantan.

The idea is to have the core government area done by 2024, Hadimuljono said. Current plans are for about 8,000 civil servants to have moved to the city by then.

Widodo previously said he expected the Presidential Palace would be moved to the new capital city before he ends his second term in 2024, along with the Home, Foreign, and Defense Ministries and the State Secretariat.

The whole relocation process is scheduled to be completed by 2045.

What effect it will have on Jakarta and the people who stay behind is unclear, said Agus Pambagio, a public policy expert from the University of Indonesia, who urged that anthropologists be brought on to study the issue.

“There will be very big social changes, both for people who work as civil servants, society in general, and local residents,” he said.