

Analysis of the Press Law and the Authority of Local Journalists in Mining Issues in East Kalimantan

**Nurliah Nurliah, Jaka Farih Agustian, Jonathan Alfando Wikandana Sucipta,
Adinda Rahmadhani, Aulia Lun Ananda Putri**

Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia
nurliah.simollah@fisip.unmul.ac.id, jakafarihagustian@fisip.unmul.ac.id,
johantan.sucipta@fisip.unmul.ac.id, rahmadhaniadinda000@gmail.com,
aulialun@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Indonesia is endowed with abundant natural resources (SDA); however, unsustainable exploitation has resulted in severe environmental consequences. East Kalimantan, as a major hub for the coal mining industry, faces significant challenges related to illegal mining, which is spread across 168 locations. The negative impacts extend beyond environmental degradation, leading to fatalities due to abandoned mining pits that were never reclaimed. In this context, mass media serves as a public watchdog through critical and in-depth reporting. However, local journalists encounter various challenges in covering mining issues, including pressure from capital owners, risks of criminalization, and limited access to resources. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Press Law in supporting press freedom and the challenges local journalists face in exposing mining realities in East Kalimantan. A qualitative approach with literature review methods was employed. The study results indicate that although local media such as RRI, Kaltim Post, Kaltim Kece, and TVRI fulfill their supervisory role as mandated by the Press Law, pressure from mining companies and political interests often obstruct objective and balanced reporting. Therefore, strengthening regulations and legal protections for journalists is essential to ensure that they can carry out their journalistic duties professionally, transparently, and responsibly, in line with the principles of environmental journalism.

I. Introduction

The Indonesia is a country rich in natural resources (SDA), ranging from forests to minerals (Pahrijal, 2023). However, these resources are often exploited without consideration for sustainable environmental management. As a result, deforestation has become a significant issue. According to data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) in 2021, deforestation in Indonesia reached 2.1 million hectares over five years (2015–2020). This situation has been exacerbated by unchecked logging activities, leading to the continuous loss of forest areas in the country (Nugraha, 2024). With the reduction of exploitable forest areas, coal mining has emerged as a new economic mainstay. Indonesia is one of the world's largest coal producers, making it a focal point for mineral resource exploitation. While coal mining contributes positively to national revenue, particularly through foreign exchange earnings, it also generates employment and increases local government revenue (PAD) in mining areas. According to Law No. 4 of 2009 on Mineral and Coal Mining, mining involves a series of activities related to the research, management, and commercial utilization of mineral and coal resources, including general investigation, exploration, feasibility studies, and construction (Yusyanti, 2016).

Unfortunately, large-scale exploitation and mismanagement that do not adhere to established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have led to severe environmental pollution and ecological damage. Moreover, the proliferation of illegal coal mines in East Kalimantan has become a significant issue. The East Kalimantan Mining Advocacy Network (JATAM Kaltim) has recorded 168 illegal mining sites in the region, including 10 sites in Berau, 111 in Kutai Kartanegara, 29 in Samarinda, 16 in North Penajam Paser, and 2 in West Kutai. According to the East Kalimantan Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), in 2021, the total coal production in the province reached approximately 294,252,801.68 tons per year, with 220,293,507.22 tons coming from companies holding Mining Business Permits (IUP) and 73,959,294.46 tons from companies holding Coal Mining Concession Work Agreements (PKP2B). However, this production figure may still include outputs from illegal mining operations. Additionally, many abandoned mining pits remain unaddressed after exploitation, posing fatal risks. Between 2011 and 2018, at least 32 people lost their lives by drowning in these abandoned coal mining pits (Dejan Abdul Hadi, Zulfa 'Azzah Fadhlika, 2020);(Kusuma, 2018).

Environmental issues related to natural resource exploitation, such as deforestation,

forest fires, and illegal mining, have increased public awareness and critical perspectives regarding environmental sustainability. Mass media has played a crucial role in amplifying these issues, especially when environmental concerns intersect with legal, social, political, economic, and cultural shifts. As a powerful instrument in shaping public opinion, mass media has a significant influence on information dissemination. Ironically, environmental reporting remains minimal. A study conducted in 2019 on online media coverage of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) revealed that environmental issues were not prioritized in news coverage (Taufiq & Disantara, 2023). Specifically, environmental journalism lacked serious commitment from journalists and media outlets. The findings from this research indicate that online media coverage of environmental issues and climate change remains low, often limited to policy narratives at the central government level without in-depth investigations. Journalistic expertise and editorial policies play crucial roles in mainstreaming these issues. The Indonesian Environmental Journalists Alliance (AJLI) acknowledges this limitation, noting that the media tends to report on environmental issues only when they involve specific events. However, environmental concerns are global in scope and require long-term solutions (Ana Nadhya Abrar, 2018).

Furthermore, the nature of environmental reporting remains insufficient in providing public education on environmental degradation. Abrar (2018) highlights that issues such as environmental destruction, global warming, and climate change are often covered by the media, yet environmental journalism should actively advocate for sustainable ecological preservation (Ana Nadhya Abrar, 2018). Meanwhile, according to IGG Maha Adi, environmental news is frequently indistinguishable from social issues such as public health, poverty, and crime. Environmental impacts are almost always linked to other complex problems. Thus, a flexible framework is needed, fostering interactions between different environmental components. In these interactions—whether biotic or abiotic—journalists must "align" with processes that minimize environmental damage (Eriza Reziana & Alex Sobur, 2023). According to its role as a component of civil society, the press or mass media is essential in environmental governance. This function is explicitly outlined in Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press and Law No. 23 of 1997 on Environmental Management, which emphasize that the press should have adequate knowledge of environmental issues to fulfill its role as a public empowerment agent. Media institutions are expected to perform three essential functions: providing information, educating the public, and serving as a mediator in addressing environmental problems.

When reporting on environmental issues, journalists should ensure that their coverage aligns with these three core media functions. This approach would help the public better understand environmental concerns and receive proper education from environmental journalists (Sahputra, 2022). Research on the press and its relationship with environmental issues, particularly in the mining sector, has been conducted in previous studies. However, no research has specifically examined the role of local journalists in East Kalimantan in covering mining-related issues. For instance, Zuhri et al. (2023) studied "The Role of Local Journalists in Reporting Deforestation Issues in West Aceh," which also explored journalists' roles in environmental reporting. However, their research focused on deforestation news in West Aceh, while the present study aims to examine the role of journalists in East Kalimantan in reporting on mining activities. Zuhri et al.'s findings indicate that science-based and environmental journalism has not been ideally implemented in deforestation coverage due to various challenges, including constraints on journalistic independence, limited access to information, and inadequate cooperation with stakeholders. Consequently, journalists struggle to obtain up-to-date data and conduct in-depth reporting (Zuhri et al., 2023).

Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2020) investigated the implementation of environmental journalism at Detik.com through a case study on "The Death of a Whale in Wakatobi." Their research found that journalists considered the whale's death newsworthy due to its public significance. The study also highlighted that journalists recognize the importance of their role in environmental advocacy but face challenges during the reporting process (Iqbal et al., 2020). Another study by Eriza Reziana and Alex Sobur (2023), titled "Environmental Journalism Practices in the Reporting of Bener Dam Construction in Wadas Village, Purworejo, Central Java," examined media framing of the Bener Dam construction from two perspectives. Viva News framed environmental journalism through an eco-populism lens, favoring local communities' interests, while Okezone adopted an eco-developmentalism perspective, emphasizing environmental development (Eriza Reziana & Alex Sobur, 2023).

II. Research Method

The writing method employed in this study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research primarily focuses on meaning and messages in accordance with the nature of its object, which is a cultural study. There is no distance between the researcher and the research object, as the researcher acts as the primary instrument, allowing for direct interaction between them. This study is a literature review in which data is obtained from written sources, including books and online materials (Marendah,

2023).

The aspects described in this research include the role of local journalists in covering mining issues in East Kalimantan and the obstacles they face in reporting these issues. Descriptive research is a method that examines human groups, objects, conditions, thought systems, or events in the present (Bungin, 2003). At this stage, the observation and interview processes related to local journalism are conducted with the following division of tasks. The lead researcher is responsible for identifying and collecting issues related to mining news coverage in East Kalimantan through online media, broadcast media, and print media. Meanwhile, observations of media and journalist informants are carried out by Research Member 1 and Research Member 2.

The data in this study consists of text excerpts from references related to mining issue coverage in East Kalimantan in the form of words and sentences relevant to the main research focus. Additionally, the data includes interview transcripts with selected local journalists who meet the informant criteria. The data sources serve as the basis for analysis. In this stage, data collection is conducted collaboratively by the research team. The validation of data in this study is achieved by gathering and carefully selecting the data to enhance its validity. The validity of the collected data is ensured through the triangulation technique. Moleong states that triangulation is a technique for verifying data validity by utilizing multiple sources (Moleong, 2005). The process of testing and developing data is carried out by researchers, as this phase is crucial for ensuring data validity. The data collection techniques used in this study include literature review and interviews. The data and analysis results are presented descriptively, supplemented with tables to facilitate reader comprehension. These stages are conducted collaboratively by the research team.

III. Result and Discussion

Environmental Journalism and News Quality in Sustainability Issues

Essentially, environmental news coverage follows the same principles as reporting on other issues such as politics, economics, social affairs, and education. However, what distinguishes environmental journalism from other types of reporting is the nature of the reality that serves as the raw material for its news content. Environmental journalism relies on environmental realities, such as pollution (Lugisnto, 2012);(Sugiarti, 2020), waste (Shafira et al., 2022);(Purwaningrum et al., 2021), air pollution (Pahrijal, 2023), forest fires (Purwaningrum et al., 2021), environmental

degradation (Anudiwanti & Ahmad, 2022), industrial pollution (Azteria & Gani, 2020), and other related issues (Achmad, 2022). Environmental journalism is defined as the process of searching, gathering, processing, and presenting various information about events, issues, trends, and practices in social life related to the non-human world (the environment) and how humans interact with it. Environmental journalism provides a detailed perspective on the interactions among various components, actors, factors, and interests that influence the environment, focusing particularly on negative impacts (Eriza Reziana & Alex Sobur, 2023);(Iqbal et al., 2020).

According to Ana Nadhya Abrar in her book *Mengenal Jurnalisme Lingkungan Hidup* (Understanding Environmental Journalism), environmental journalism prioritizes environmental issues with a commitment to sustainability (Ana Nadhya Abrar, 2018). This implies that journalists covering environmental issues must not only possess strong journalistic skills but also have a profound understanding of environmental conservation, nature, human interaction, and sustainable development. Consequently, journalists should not only report environmental issues but also provide information on solutions and conservation efforts. L.R. Baskoro defines environmental journalism as all journalistic processes, from information gathering to the writing of news about the environment (LR. Baskoro, 2003). As a news genre, environmental reporting serves to educate, inform, and engage audiences. An environmental journalist or news writer must be able to present information in an engaging manner, making complex legal regulations, environmental laws, or pollution levels more comprehensible to the general public. Journalism encompasses a series of activities, including searching, acquiring, possessing, storing, managing, and disseminating news or information in written, audio, or visual formats through mass media (Widarmanto, 2017). According to Rosentiel, journalism quality is assessed from two perspectives: academic and professional. The academic perspective employs two approaches, demand approach and production approach, to determine journalistic quality standards (Hallward-Driemeier et al., 2020).

The first approach, the demand approach, asserts that quality journalism should meet audience needs and preferences, emphasizing reader or viewer interest in assessing information quality. The second approach, the product approach, argues that improving content quality requires distinct characteristics in the messages conveyed. In this regard, uniqueness or distinctive features of the information are central to enhancing journalistic quality. Nevertheless, professionals tend to favor the product approach in evaluating journalistic quality, as observed from an academic perspective

(Pratiwi & Ambardi, 2020).

Implementation of the Press Law in Reporting Mining Issues in East Kalimantan: A Case Study of Local Media Kaltim

The study on the Analysis of the Role of Journalists According to the Press Law in Reporting Mining Issues in East Kalimantan aims to examine the authority of journalists based on Press Law No. 40, Article 6. This law stipulates that the press plays a role in fulfilling the public's right to information, upholding fundamental democratic values, promoting the rule of law and human rights, respecting diversity, shaping public opinion, conducting oversight, criticism, corrections, and suggestions, and advocating for justice and truth (Sahputra, 2022). Several media outlets are included in this study due to their extensive audience reach in East Kalimantan, including Kaltim Kece, which represents online media; RRI and TVRI Kaltim, representing public broadcasting; Kaltim Post, as well as representatives from the Indonesian Journalistic Alliance (AJI) and the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI) of East Kalimantan. Kaltim Kece.id, established in 2018 as a digital news outlet, has become one of the pillars of information in East Kalimantan. As a local media outlet, Kaltim Kece.id not only covers general news but also conducts in-depth investigations into critical regional issues. Felanans Mustari, the editorial head, provides valuable insights into the operations and challenges faced by the media in fulfilling their journalistic responsibilities.

Since 2021, Kaltim Kece.id has been verified by the Press Council, both administratively and factually. This verification confirms that the media adheres to professional journalism standards. With a team consisting of 12 journalists, two editors, one video graphic designer, and one graphic designer, Kaltim Kece.id ensures that each team member possesses officially recognized competencies.

"All journalists here have obtained competency certification from the Press Council, including two senior journalists, one mid-level journalist, and six or seven junior journalists," stated Felanans. The issues covered by Kaltim Kece.id are diverse, including the National Capital (IKN), public policy, law, politics, and the environment. One of the most sensitive topics frequently covered is illegal mining. Felanans explained that reporting on illegal mining often triggers threats against journalists. To address this, Kaltim Kece.id implements strict Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that focus on shifting threats to the media institution rather than individual journalists. Threats against journalists are one of the biggest challenges for Kaltim Kece.id. Felanans emphasized the importance of SOPs in mitigating these threats. By directing threats

toward the media institution rather than individuals, journalists are protected from direct risks. Additionally, the media ensures that all reports and investigations are conducted with high caution, prioritizing fact verification and information accuracy.

Kaltim Kece.id upholds strong ethical and moral standards in journalism. The recruitment process involves stringent procedures, including administrative screening, interviews, and psychological tests. Many recruited journalists have backgrounds as activists, strengthening their social awareness in news coverage. Ethical journalism serves as the foundation for every report, ensuring that the information presented to the public is accurate and accountable. Regarding funding, Kaltim Kece.id relies on collaborations with local governments and private clients. The media strictly avoids using "aspiration funds" or *pokir* (budget allocations from legislative members), which often compromise media professionalism. Through a transparent and ethical funding model, Kaltim Kece.id maintains its integrity and independence in news reporting. Kaltim Kece.id exemplifies a local media outlet committed to journalistic integrity and the courage to address sensitive issues in East Kalimantan. With strict SOP implementation, a focus on competency training, and ethical funding, "This media successfully navigates the challenges of the journalistic world. My team and I have proven that with integrity and commitment, local media can play a crucial role in delivering accurate and responsible information to the public," stated a former journalist from Kaltim Post.

Journalists at Kaltim Kece.id have frequently covered mining issues, both legal and illegal. However, such coverage often carries risks. According to Felanans, nearly all journalists at Kaltim Kece have reported on illegal mining. While threats against journalists covering sensitive topics exist, they rarely escalate. The media leadership clarified that threats are usually delivered through text messages on WhatsApp rather than direct physical threats. Therefore, Kaltim Kece enforces strict SOPs to ensure journalists' safety during high-risk reporting. The media institution assumes potential threats, shielding individual journalists from harm. Nevertheless, threats are not the only challenge journalists at Kaltim Kece face. They also frequently encounter bribery attempts to suppress certain news publications. "Bribes are usually directed at individual journalists rather than editorial leaders or editors. Rejecting bribes is part of the ethical and moral principles of every journalist. However, we acknowledge that some journalists may be tempted to accept them. We strive to uphold integrity by refusing such offers," said Felanans.

In journalist recruitment, Kaltim Kece does not implement a specific integrity test. However, they tend to hire journalists with activist backgrounds or individuals whose values align with the media's ethical stance. Organizational experience and social awareness are key attributes for journalists working at Kaltim Kece. Regarding media business operations, Kaltim Kece also collaborates with local governments as a source of revenue, while avoiding aspirational funds from DPRD members, which are deemed unprofessional. "We have gradually reduced coverage of illegal mining issues due to the overwhelming number of cases and the involvement of numerous stakeholders in these illegal practices. We feel that our reports rarely lead to significant change and often put our journalists at risk. Therefore, we are more selective in choosing topics and focus on issues that have a direct impact on society," Felanans explained. In executing their journalistic duties, Kaltim Kece relies on the networks and connections of their journalists to mitigate risks. They often identify the individuals involved in particular cases and assess how far they can report without facing excessive danger. The media is also highly cautious in maintaining relationships with news sources to avoid engaging in unethical practices that could compromise their integrity.

Overall, Kaltim Kece is committed to ensuring the safety of its journalists while adhering to strict journalistic principles. They believe that high-quality journalism stems from thorough verification processes and comprehensive source gathering. Although this approach prevents them from competing in terms of content volume with other media, Kaltim Kece remains steadfast in its principles to uphold integrity and credibility.

Analysis of Independence and Integrity of Local Media in Covering Mining Issues

Ana Nadya Abrar asserts that the media serves as a public sphere where critical issues can be discussed democratically (Ana Nadhya Abrar, 2018). Kaltim Kece.id functions as a public sphere by providing a platform to discuss crucial issues such as illegal mining and public policies. Similarly, RRI Samarinda also serves as a public sphere through its regular segment, Dialog Kentongan Tanggap Bencana, which enables the public to access essential information on disaster management and environmental issues. This demonstrates that both media outlets contribute to a healthy and democratic public discourse. The media also plays an advocacy role for the public, particularly in highlighting marginalized issues. Kaltim Kece.id engages in advocacy by exposing illegal mining issues and their impact on local communities. Likewise, RRI Samarinda, in collaboration with NGOs such as WALHI, advocates for environmental

issues that often receive little attention. This advocacy role illustrates how the media can amplify public voices and influence policy changes. The theory of social construction of reality suggests that the media plays a role in shaping social reality through the selection, organization, and presentation of news.

Kaltim Kece.id and RRI Samarinda construct social reality concerning environmental and mining issues in East Kalimantan through intensive coverage that focuses on social impacts. The media does not merely report facts but also shapes public perceptions of environmental concerns by emphasizing threats, challenges, and related policies. In the context of environmental communication, it is crucial in educating and raising public awareness about environmental issues (Sahputra, 2022). Kaltim Kece.id, for instance, actively reports on illegal mining issues and threats against journalists. This approach reflects the media's commitment to environmental communication by providing in-depth and relevant information to society. RRI Samarinda, through programs such as Dialog Kentongan Tanggap Bencana, also plays a role in environmental communication by delivering up-to-date disaster information. From the perspective of journalistic ethics, Ana Nadya Abrar highlights the importance of accuracy, responsibility, and integrity (Ana Nadiyah Abrar, 2018). Kaltim Kece.id demonstrates a commitment to journalistic ethics through a rigorous recruitment process and a strong emphasis on ethical reporting. Felanans Mustari ensures that all reports undergo strict fact verification. Similarly, RRI Samarinda upholds integrity in environmental reporting by collaborating with BPBD and BMKG to ensure information accuracy.

Pratiwi and Ambardi emphasize the importance of journalistic quality, which includes accuracy, balance, and fairness in reporting (Pratiwi & Ambardi, 2020). Kaltim Kece.id maintains quality by employing certified journalists and implementing strict standard operating procedures (SOPs) when covering sensitive issues. This approach reflects their commitment to high-quality journalism. RRI Samarinda, through its informative disaster-related programs, also strives to maintain quality in its reporting. The gatekeeping theory explains how editors and journalists select which news will be published (Rahmi et al., 2024). In practice, Felanans Mustari at Kaltim Kece.id plays a crucial role in selecting illegal mining issues while ensuring that threats are directed at media institutions rather than individual journalists. This illustrates a selective and strategic gatekeeping process. Similarly, Muhammad Ridhuan at Kaltim Post demonstrates gatekeeping by prioritizing environmental news with high news value for front-page placement. Regarding media functions, Lacy and Rosenstiel discuss the role of the media in society, including providing information, educating, and

monitoring power (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015);(Fianto et al., 2023).

Kaltim Kece.id and RRI Samarinda fulfill these functions by providing educational information on environmental and disaster issues while overseeing illegal mining activities. Through investigative reporting and informative programs, these media outlets play a vital role in ensuring accountability and raising public awareness. In media business model theory, the model determines the independence and integrity of the media (Widagdhaprasana et al., 2024). Kaltim Kece.id adopts a business model that relies on cooperation with local governments and private clients while rejecting aspirational funds from legislators to maintain independence. This reflects how ethical business models can support journalistic integrity. Meanwhile, RRI Samarinda, as a public broadcasting institution, receives support through partnerships with BPBD and BMKG, ensuring accurate and reliable information without financial dependence that could compromise independence. Kaltim Kece.id, RRI Samarinda, and Kaltim Post operate based on the principles outlined by Ana Nadya Abrar, demonstrating their commitment to social construction of reality, environmental communication, journalistic ethics, journalism quality, gatekeeping, media functions, and media business models that uphold integrity and independence. These media outlets play a critical role in delivering accurate and responsible information to the public while navigating various challenges in covering sensitive issues such as the environment and mining.

Lacy and Rosenstiel highlight the social function of the media in connecting communities with the information necessary for making informed decisions. Kaltim Kece.id and RRI Samarinda fulfill this social function by providing in-depth and accurate information on key issues. Through careful and fact-based reporting, both media outlets help the public understand complex situations such as illegal mining and disaster management, enabling them to take appropriate action. Lacy and Rosenstiel also emphasize the impact of media on social change. Investigative reporting by Kaltim Kece.id on illegal mining and environmental policies illustrates how the media can generate public attention and influence policy changes. For example, by exposing CSR issues involving Bayan and the 21 IUP scandal, this media outlet has prompted responses from authorities. Similarly, RRI Samarinda, through its disaster preparedness programs, helps communities become more aware and prepared for disaster situations, influencing preventive measures and disaster response strategies. Media sustainability involves the ability to endure in the long term while maintaining integrity and journalistic quality. Kaltim Kece.id demonstrates a sustainable model by relying on

ethical collaborations and rejecting funding that could undermine independence. This ensures that the media can continue operating without compromising journalistic values.

Likewise, RRI Samarinda ensures sustainability through strategic partnerships that support its operations while maintaining independence and quality reporting. Through this additional analysis, it becomes evident that Kaltim Kece.id and RRI Samarinda function not only as information providers but also as democratic public spheres and advocates for society. They fulfill essential social functions by connecting the public with necessary information, influencing social change, and ensuring their operational sustainability through ethical and independent business models. Consequently, these two media outlets play a crucial role in raising public awareness, promoting positive change, and maintaining journalistic integrity in East Kalimantan.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of journalists' authority as stipulated in Article 6 of the Press Law No. 40 of 1999, it can be concluded that local media outlets such as Kaltim Kece.id, RRI Samarinda, TVRI, Kaltim Post, as well as journalists from PWI Kaltim and AJI Samarinda, play a significant role in overseeing mining issues in East Kalimantan, despite facing various challenges. In carrying out their duties, these journalists strive to uphold the public's right to information by providing in-depth reporting on the impacts of illegal mining, public policies, and environmental issues affecting local communities. The consistent engagement of journalists in investigative reporting reflects their commitment to press freedom and democratic values, even though they frequently encounter pressure, censorship, and threats from interested parties. Additionally, local journalists contribute to upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights by exposing various violations in the mining sector. Their critical and fact-based reporting serves as an effort to shape public opinion, increasing awareness of social issues while monitoring government policies and corporate practices that negatively affect society. In the context of East Kalimantan's social diversity, media outlets also strive to maintain balance by providing space for various perspectives, thereby preventing polarization and fostering social harmony. Despite threats and temptations of external intervention, journalists endeavor to uphold their integrity and professionalism in performing their duties. Their independence in reporting on mining issues serves as concrete evidence of their commitment to justice and truth in the public interest. Thus, it can be concluded that local journalists in East

Kalimantan play a crucial role in ensuring press freedom while contributing to the pursuit of transparency, accountability, and justice in addressing the complex and challenging issues surrounding the mining sector.

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