Nias Islands expansion urgency through top-down strategy in Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean

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**ABSTRACT**

The expansion of Nias Islands Province is the desire of the political community. However, until now, the expansion effort has not received central government approval. Threats to the region can come from a variety of sources and forms, including internal conflicts, transnational conflicts, and military threats. This research aims to analyze the urgency of the expansion of Nias Islands through a top-down strategy, considering national threats and strategic factors. The research method used was an analytical descriptive approach with a qualitative type of research. Data were obtained through interviews and observations, as well as primary and secondary data relevant to the expansion of Nias Islands Province. The results show the urgency of the expansion of Nias Islands involving a top-down strategy by considering threat factors and national strategic policies. The relevance of the formation of Nias Islands Province can be seen from geographical, geopolitical, and demographic factors. The readiness of this region to become a New Autonomous Region (DOB) is reflected in agreements between regional heads, infrastructure availability, and financial support during the transition. The central government needs to understand that the expansion of Nias Islands is not only a local need but also a strategic step in maintaining national security and stability.

**Keywords:** expansion, Nias Islands, Top-down new autonomous regions

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**INTRODUCTION**

The division of autonomous regions in a decentralized system that divides power over sub-national governments is essential in a nation state to realize the basic goals or values of political society related to freedom, equality, and prosperity, all of which cannot be achieved if they are managed by the government in a high degree (Gel’Man & Ryzhenkov, 2011; Hlynsdóttir, 2020; Moonti, 2017). The need for services to these values is very complex in the vast, plural and heterogeneous territory of the Republic of Indonesia. Thus, the division of power within the nation state is essential to achieving these important goals and values (Marx, 2002; Olssen, 2020; Spring, 2014).

The division of powers according to Rivaldo et al. (2023) tries to divide the territory of power in a nation state in the first three categories, the division of state power according to the fields of government (Capital Devisin of Powers or Horizontal Devision of Power) namely executive, legislative and judicial government, or known as *Trias Politika* in Suny (1982). The second is the division of state power based on smaller areas within the national territory (Areal Division of Power or Vertical Division of Power). This separation of powers, which includes only the executive and legislature, is referred to as local government (Bulman-Pozen, 2012; Conway, 2011; Huq & Michaels, 2016). While the third is the Non-governmental Division of Power as a space for participation of power from non-government which includes private institutions and civil society in realizing the goals and ideals to be achieved by a state (Mavee, 2022; Prianto & Suharnoko, 2021).

At least two fundamental procedures of a region or region can be divided as an autonomous region based on the Government Regulation on regional expansion (Gultom, 2018; Saputra, 2021). These two things are democratic procedures (bottom up) and technocratic transition procedures (top down) (Sulistian, 2018). This bottom-up procedure may be more familiar because Indonesia's current development culture is more prominent than the demands or aspirations of the bottom community (Ardiansyah et al., 2017). Likewise, the procedure for the expansion of autonomous regions of this model is bottom-up which requires proposals from the
aspirations of the bottom community (Ghorbani et al., 2020; Nilsson et al., 2017). Of course, in submitting the proposal, it must meet the criteria for regional expansion such as from the aspects of economic capability, regional potential, socio-cultural, socio-political, population, and area (Abbink, 2011). This very strict requirement is not more or less the proposal for regional expansion in Indonesia has not come to fruition.

Furthermore, this top-down procedure requires sharp analysis and sensitivity from the central government to find out the urgency of the expansion of an area. In this context, the central government is more pro-active in seeing the urgency of an area to be expanded due to threat factors or as a strategic area. The top-down procedure does not have to meet other requirements such as economic capability, regional potential, socio-cultural, socio-political, population, and area of an area (Pambudi, 2022). Top-down is also not just about realizing the basic goals or values of political society related to freedom, equality, and welfare of local communities. However, top-down procedures ensure that an area can be expanded through threat factors or considered a national strategic area.

Meanwhile, the expansion of Nias Islands Province has become the desire of the political community that has been struggling for more than a decade. The application for the expansion of Nias province has so far started from the bottom-up channel, to the establishment of the Preparatory Board for the Establishment of the Expansion of Nias Islands Province (BPPKKN, Badan Persiapan Pembentukan Pemekaran Provinsi Kepulauan Nias) which to this day continues to meet the requirements for the expansion of Nias Islands Province by Bottom-Up (Zebua, 2017). However, all these efforts never reached a single commitment that could be agreed by the central government. Even in the midst of the struggle for the expansion of the Province, the Central Government took the time to bloom four provinces at once on the island of Papua, namely (Central Papua Province, Mountain Papua Province, South Papua Province, and Southwest Papua Province).

Threats to an area can come from anywhere and in visible and abstract forms. According to Wada (2019), threats can be divided into three groups, including: 1) Interstate conflicts involving the international world or relations between countries and other countries that are in geo-political interests; 2) Internal conflicts within heterogeneous states; and 3) Transnational conflict with the entry of terrorist groups (radicalism) that can disrupt national stability and security. There are at least nine security threats or military threats in conventional and visible forms such as military aggression, violation of territorial boundaries (land, sea and air), espionage, sabotage, acts of terror at the same level, separatist movements, armed rebellions, civil wars, and treason movements. These threats have the potential to occur in Nias Islands. The potential threat is not only motivated by the low level of education of Nias people to understand invisible proxy threats such as knowledge of technology, information and communication, knowledge of the dangers of drugs and others, but is influenced by crucial factors such as geography, demography and geo-politics of Nias Island.

This research aims to analyze the urgency of the expansion of Nias Islands through a top-down strategy, considering national threats and strategic factors. The research hopes to spread awareness to the central government who needs to understand the potential threat risks that may occur in this area and engage a proactive approach to ensure national security and stability.

METHOD
This research used an analytical descriptive approach with a qualitative type of research. The qualitative approach was chosen because the main focus of the study lies on the processes, interactions of subjects, and the behaviors displayed by them. It was considered appropriate to explore a deep understanding of the urgency of the expansion of Nias Islands Province and involve informants in the context.

Applied data collection techniques involve question-and-answer interviews or direct conversations with research informants. This approach allows researchers to gain deeper and contextual insights into the urgency of expansion and the views of stakeholders. An observation through direct visits at the research site was also carried out to obtain data directly related to the research context.

The main data source comes from primary data obtained through interviews with research informants. This approach ensures that the subject’s perceptions and views are well involved in the analysis of the study. In addition, secondary data related to the expansion of Nias Islands Province are also used, including relevant documentary reports. The combination of primary and secondary data is expected to provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of the urgency and dynamics of the expansion. Then finally, all the data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Fundamental Reasons for Supporting Nias Islands’ Status as a National Strategic Area
Geographical, Geopolitical and Demographic Factors
The Nias Islands, located in the western region of Sumatra Island, act as the vanguard of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) in the west, a very vital position to maintain sovereignty and national interests in the region. The two leading islands, Wunga Island and Simuk Island, are in the Nias Islands Zone, making it the outermost point on the western side of Indonesia. Nias Islands are vulnerable to threats with the
resilience of vulnerable communities, and strengthening its status as a Province can provide strengthening to national sovereignty and security. Nias ethnicity is the majority group with a dominant population distribution in four districts and one city in the Nias Islands.

Demographically, Nias ethnicity is the majority group in the region, with a population of 898,689 people, making the potential of Human Resources as the main aspect to support regional development. Nias Islands are included in the 3T (Front, Disadvantaged, and Isolated; Terdepan, Tertinggal, dan Terisolir) area according to Presidential Regulation No. 105 of 2021. The striking disparity in development makes community resilience vulnerable to various threats, so strengthening of defense, security, and welfare aspects is needed.

This region has economic potential through the agricultural, plantation, livestock, maritime, industrial, mining, and tourism sectors. The maritime, agriculture, and tourism sectors have high production potential and can be a leading modality that supports the needs of export and import markets. The large population (898,689 inhabitants) provides great potential to support regional and national development. Human Resource Development is a priority to support the Golden Generation 2045 and achieve national development targets.

Development agendas such as the surviving tourism area at Sorake Beach and the Stone Jumping Attraction, the construction of urban flats, and the construction of the trans/outer island ring road of Nias are the focus to support economic growth. Inter-regional connectivity and coastal development are efforts to increase development and economic growth in Nias Islands.

The Importance of Top-Down Approach in the Expansion of Nias Islands

The top-down approach in the division of Nias Islands into the New Autonomous Region (DOB, Daerah Otonomi Baru) of Nias Islands Province is very important considering the characteristics of the area which includes one large island and 133 small islands, including the two outer islands, Simuk Island and Wunga Island. The region requires development approaches that are specific to various aspects of development, and a top-down approach can provide an effective and efficient framework.

Nias Islands is faced with challenges as an isolated and underdeveloped area in North Sumatra Province with a significant level of poor population. With the span of government control hampered by its geographical location far from the center of government of North Sumatra Province, a top-down approach can provide more coordinated direction, minimize costs, and accelerate the development process. In addition, the geographical location of Nias Islands which is prone to natural disasters shows that comprehensive and integrated development planning is needed to reduce disaster risk and deal with its impacts. A top-down approach can support disaster risk reduction policies and rapid disaster management, ensuring a coordinated and effective response.

In the context of geopolitics and geostategy of Indonesia’s outer islands, a top-down approach is important to ensure the sustainability of national interests and the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia. By involving considerations from the national level, the implementation of the DOB of Nias Islands Province can be directed in accordance with the National Strategy Interests, providing a strong legal foundation in accordance with Law No.23 of 2014 concerning Local Government. The top-down approach in the division of Nias Islands into the New Autonomous Region (DOB) of Nias Islands Province refers to a method of planning and implementation that starts from the central or national government level and then is downgraded to the regional or local level. The top-down approach starts with strategic planning from the central government that takes into account the characteristics and special needs of the Nias Islands. This includes identifying development goals, allocating resources, and establishing policies that support the expansion. This strategic planning provides a solid basis for the implementation of the DOB of Nias Islands Province. Through a top-down approach, coordination between central and local governments can be better integrated. Policies implemented in expansion, such as disaster risk reduction, poverty alleviation, and infrastructure development, can be aligned with national goals, optimizing development outcomes.

In the top-down approach, the financial allocation for the expansion of Nias Islands can be more planned and adequate. The central government can determine the financial support needed to ensure the sustainability and success of the DOB of Nias Islands Province. This includes determining funds for infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and other key sectors. Technical assistance and human resources can be channeled more effectively. The central government can provide guidance and technical support to help Nias Islands local governments overcome challenges in the implementation of expansion, such as administrative management, development planning, and strengthening human resource capacity. Although the top-down approach focuses on the role of government, it also needs to pay attention to community empowerment. Effective communication between the central government and local communities needs to be emphasized to ensure active participation and community understanding of the benefits and objectives of the expansion of Nias Islands.
The Relevance and Urgency of Nias Islands Expansion in Facing Threats in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean

The Relevance of Nias Islands Expansion

The proposal for the establishment of Nias Islands Province has gone through strict administrative and technical stages, in accordance with Government Regulation Number 78 of 2007. This process includes administrative, technical, and physical regional requirements that have been met through a series of decisions and in-depth studies. The results of careful research became the basis of legitimacy for the formation of new provinces. The establishment of Nias Islands Province is strategic in facing various threats in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. The existence of this new province can improve deterrence and response to security and geopolitical dynamics in the region, strengthening Indonesia's position in safeguarding national interests on the high seas. In accordance with Law No. 23 of 2014, the formation of new provinces must consider the importance of the national strategy. Nias Islands Province, with its territorial characteristics directly adjacent to the Indian Ocean, is an important consideration in efforts to maintain the sovereignty and security of the Republic of Indonesia. This step was taken to ensure that the national strategy can be effectively implemented in the region. The Nias Islands have significant geopolitical and geostategic relevance. Directly adjacent to the Indian Ocean, the region is a tipping point in terms of security and geopolitics. Outermost islands such as Simuk Island and Wunga Island add urgency to the formation of this new province, given the potential threats and infiltration that can affect national interests.

The Urgency of Nias Islands Expansion

The urgency of the expansion of Nias Islands Province is illustrated through the results of a feasibility study conducted by the Research and Development Agency of North Sumatra Province. This study shows that Nias Islands Provincial Candidates have a solid basis for recommendation. The establishment of this province is expected to have a positive impact, especially in improving community welfare, through more effective resource management and responsiveness to local needs.

In the context of defense and security, it should be noted that the Nias Islands are potentially vulnerable to the threat of infiltration. As the outer islands, the establishment of Nias Islands Province can be a strategic step to strengthen national resilience, ensure the territorial integrity of Indonesia, and respond to potential threats that may arise in the region.

Despite the current delays and uncertainties related to the moratorium imposed by the central government, the opportunity to form a new province remains relevant. The central government's great attention to the outermost regions, including the expansion of Nias Islands Province, is in line with Nawacita's vision which emphasizes "building from the periphery". The government's focus on tourism, maritime and priority development sectors provides a positive impetus for the development of Nias Islands.

The establishment of Nias Islands Province can also be a strategic step to reduce potential threats in the western part of the Republic of Indonesia. By strengthening this region, the central government can maintain the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia from various potential threats that may arise in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean. Therefore, despite the obstacles and delays, the urgency of the expansion of Nias Islands Province remains relevant and an integral part of efforts to build and maintain the integrity of the country.

The readiness of Nias Islands to become a New Autonomous Region (DOB) of Nias Islands Province is reflected in a number of important factors. First, it has been agreed by the five regional heads in Nias Islands that Gunungsitoli will become the Provincial Capital, a decision that has received approval from the Governor of North Sumatra, Commission II DPR RI, and DPD RI.

Second, the Governor's office and the first level DPRD office are available and have been agreed upon by the five regional heads. This step has been recommended by the Governor of North Sumatra, Commission II DPR RI, and DPD RI, and involves the use of Nias Regent offices and Nias Regency level II DPRD offices which will be vacant after moving to new locations.

Furthermore, there is an agreement between the five regional heads in the Nias Islands and the North Sumatra Provincial Government as stated in the decision of the Regional Government / DPRD. This agreement supports the budget during the transition of Nias Islands Province to be definitive. This support includes grants for government administration and regional elections, which will be provided by the Governor and DPRD level I of North Sumatra, Regent and DPRD level II of Nias Regency, Regent and DPRD level II of South Nias, Regent and DPRD level II of West Nias, and Mayor and DPRD level II of Gunungsitoli City. Despite delays from the central government regarding the moratorium on expansion, the opportunity to form new provinces remains relevant. The central government needs to consider the results of a positive study for the welfare of the people of Nias Islands. In addition, steps towards the establishment of Nias Islands Province require joint support from all levels of society, common vision and mission, and continuous communication efforts to relevant parties and the general public. In this context, the spiritual and physical struggle by all Nias people is realized to support the realization of the Nias Islands Province.

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CONCLUSION

The Indonesian government is urgently considering the expansion of the Nias Islands, a top-down strategy based on threat factors and national strategic policy. The region, with 103 empty islands and a 3T status, is considered a New Autonomous Region (DOB) due to its geopolitical and geostategic position. The government must integrate coordination between central and local governments, plan financial allocations, and distribute technical assistance effectively. Effective communication between the central government and local communities is crucial for active participation and understanding of the benefits of the expansion. The state's role is crucial in supporting this strategic move.

REFERENCES


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