

New Indonesian Capital in Borneo: From Rural Misery to Grody Dreams of Urban Glory

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An old road between Balikpapan and Samarinda passes through the poor villages, through rural slums, as well as stalls selling second-rate local fruits. The cheap, unhygienic eateries, are now half-empty. While the traffic is still heavy here, the 'real action' is somewhere else; a few kilometers away, where the new motorway is being constructed; a motorway which will, eventually, connect Balikpapan, Samarinda and potentially the new Indonesian capital city which is expected to rise somewhere around the now dirt poor Sepaku Village, in the area of Penajam Paser Utara.

The government of President Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi) is promising that the new capital will touch the skies, eclipsing places like Brasilia, Malaysian Putra Jaya, or Canberra. Nothing short of Dubai or Manhattan, in the middle of the logged out, monstrously scarred, poisoned island of Borneo, known as "Kalimantan" in Indonesia.

While virtually all Indonesian cities could easily be defined as urbanistic disasters, the new capital is supposed to be totally different, boasting green wide avenues and impressive architectural masterpieces that would be envied by the entire world.

Indonesia has already made one such an attempt in its recent history – it promised to convert its island of Batam which is located just a stone's throw from Singapore – into something much more impressive than Singapore itself (a city-state with one of the highest quality of life on Earth).

Two years ago, I travelled to Batam, where I discovered a grotesque, bitter reality. I reported it in one of my previous essays entitled, ["Batam Island – Indonesia's Sorry Attempt to Create Second Singapore"](#). The island had been thoroughly destroyed. Nothing public was left, and nothing, absolutely nothing was built for the people. Precisely just as in all other parts of Indonesia. The ugliness of the urban areas of Batam was unimaginable. Corruption was omnipresent. The feeble attempt to turn the island into an industrial, productive area, collapsed. What survived, at least for some period of time, was the prostitution and gambling. Eventually, the gambling 'industry' collapsed, too. Only prostitution, together with some sand exports to Singapore, prevailed.

Presently, there is not one single city in Indonesia, which could be defined as livable. Not one.

Why would the new capital be any different? Why would Indonesian people believe the government, which has been known for lying, for building sand castles, and for many long decades of absolute ineptness?

There is not one elegantly built sidewalk, anywhere in Indonesia. So why should there,

suddenly be, hundreds of kilometers of beautiful avenues and promenades in the middle of Borneo?

All public places, in all the Indonesian cities, have been commercialized, privatized, or outright stolen. Why would it be different now? What is this talk about big parks, green areas? Every big project in Jakarta, Surabaya or Bandung begins like that: endless promises of “city walks”, of malls overflowing with green areas. In the end: nothing! A concrete sprawl, parking lots, and nothing public whatsoever. Maritime cities lacking promenades, urban centers without public parks, concert halls, or first-rate museums. There is no place on Earth like this: absolute extreme corruption, and spite for the people.

So, is there any reason why the new capital would change the entire culture of graft, or lack of productivity and imagination? It will be, after all, constructed by the same individuals, same developers, same companies and the same government, as in all other parts of the country.

Along the old road on which we drive, most of the people live in poverty, or if international standards were to apply: in misery.

At Bukit Suharto (Suharto Hill), a peripheral area of the planned new capital, Ms. Niah, an old woman living alone in her shack, selling traditional rice cakes for a living, is not hopeful about her future. Here, as elsewhere in Indonesia, governments have come and gone, dropping empty promises, leaving people with basically nothing, just wooden walls, stained mattresses, and *pasrah*, which can be loosely translated as ‘submissive melancholy’.



Ms. Niah living an Indonesian-style ‘middle class’ life (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)



(Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

Ms. Niah is not afraid to speak:

“I did not know about the plan to move the capital here, by the government. They tell us nothing. What I know is that I have never felt the benefits of development carried out by the government. For decades, there was no help that I’d receive. I don’t even get that subsidized rice delivery, which each and every poor Indonesian is entitled to, at least in theory. I get nothing. On the contrary, I actually feel disadvantaged by what is called development. Since the government built the toll road not far from here, the traffic of the vehicles on this road has been reduced, and as a result, my rice cakes do not sell.”

A few hundred meters away, Mr. Abdul Gani, a retired civil servant actually worries about his future. The government may force him out of his home, if it felt that his land may be at least of some use for the new capital project.

“A few weeks ago, an officer came to the houses in our village to collect information on the ownership deeds for land, buildings and fields, without giving us a hint of what reasons the data collected is for. Then, there were rumors circulating in this area, that our land would be taken, confiscated by the government, because we do not have ownership certificates. Everything is vague for us. We don’t know what to expect.”

“Dubai? Manhattan? Really? Please be serious. No, we don’t believe that the government could build a city like Dubai here.”



Along the road (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

All along the road, we hardly encounter any native people of Borneo. The entire area is now populated by so called trans-migrants – individuals and families that were injected here, mainly from Java, South Sulawesi and Bali, after the 1965 military coup orchestrated by the West and by the Indonesian right-wing elites and religious cadres. Trans-migrants have been historically placed along the important roads, effectively fragmenting Kalimantan/Borneo. The right-wing, in fact fascist dictator Suharto considered *Dayak* native people of this island to be ‘Communist’, because of their traditional, communal culture and way of life. He did not trust them. In fact, he busied himself destroying their “long houses”, and their philosophy of life.

Trans-migrants have also been playing an extremely important role in Borneo, which is one of the wealthiest, in terms of natural resources, islands on Earth: their increasing presence has guaranteed that the local people would not be able to one day unite and demand independence from the colonialist Java.

The entire island is now ruined as a result of Jakarta’s rule, as well as the “trans-migration”. It has been devastated, burned, deforested, poisoned. Once resembling paradise on earth, it is now scarred and humiliated. Its original inhabitants are subjugated, kept divided and badly informed, and uneducated on purpose.

Then comes the [new capital project](#).

In an unusually bold report, the *Jakarta Globe* wrote on December 18, 2019:

“A study has revealed the names of numerous national and local politicians who would reap profits from the capital city relocation mega-project, including the brother of defense minister Prabowo Subianto, Hashim Djojohadikusumo, and the coordinating minister of maritime affairs and investment, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan.

The study, “Who Is the New Capital City For?” was conducted by a coalition of civil organizations; Mining Advocacy Network (Jatam), the Indonesian Forum for Environment (Walhi), Trend Asia and Forest Watch Indonesia, and took three months to complete.

It studied the oligarchic connections in the mega-project and its environmental and societal impacts.

The report revealed names of people who have assets and concessions in the extractive industries such as coal, palm oil and lumber as well as energy plants in the area of East Kalimantan where the new capital is going to be built.

It also suggested the project could be used as a smokescreen to brush off the corporations’ dirt for the environmental damage they have done there.

Within the 180,000-hectare area for the new so-called smart city, there are 162 mining, forestry, palm oil, coal and property concessions.

Around 158 of them are coal mines that have left at least 94 deadly-deep holes

in the area...”



Indonesian girl phone in a typical village in the area – pollution and misery (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)



‘But we’ve got 4G’ (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

We met two leading researchers from the *Institut Dayakologi* (“Dayakology Institute”), Richardus Giring and Julianto Makmur, in the city of Pontianak, West Kalimantan.

Mainly, we wanted to know, whether the relocation of the capital to Borneo would benefit or harm the local people.

Mr. Giring elaborated:

“Since the issue of relocation of the capital was endorsed by the Jokowi government, I have never come across any open and transparent analysis. All the studies tend to show positive aspects, without considering the risks and negative impacts of the relocation; ignoring the interests of the Kalimantan people. There should be a serious study, analyzing what the relocation of the capital would do to the locals.”

“Aside from seeing the relocation of the capital as a solution to what is happening in Jakarta, this plan should also be seen from the perspective of the impacts on Kalimantan and its people. We do not want this capital relocation to be a kind of escape from the problems that Jakarta is facing; we don’t want to move those problems to Kalimantan.”

“The ecological injustice and the destruction of the social structure of the people of Kalimantan have been occurring since a long time ago. Consistently, various government sectoral (forestry, energy, etc.) have only made Kalimantan an area of plunder, be it its forests or other natural resources. The Kalimantan that we see today is a dreadful legacy of the past and present. Although there are still few areas of pristine tropical forests left on the island, they are only small remnants.”



Map showing relocation of the new Indonesian capital to the island of Borneo (Map: [Caitlin Dempsey](#) using Natural Earth Quick Start)

Working all over the island, filming and writing about the dreadful situation, for years, we could only agree. And Mr. Giring continued:

“What’s the point of promising a big, beautiful and magnificent new capital, if it is not preceded by proper and careful planning and study? So far, what they have done is only feasibility studies based on positive predictions. No studies on the risks, or on the negative impacts that may arise. If it is not done carefully, the whole thing will definitely turn out to be a blunder. We know that this is not just a plan: a lot of resources have already been spent. But still, the important thing is to anticipate beforehand what lies ahead; to study risks, the environmental impacts.”

“If not, people will have no sense of ownership. The new capital will only

belong to Jakarta's elites, and to Jokowi. And in the end, it will only move the problems from Jakarta to Kalimantan. It's beginning to look like a beauty contest, where the important thing is how things look. As long as they appear to look magnificent, great! Short video clips created by designers/architects are shown everywhere by the mass media. But it is irrelevant to the people of Borneo and for the entire Indonesia."

"I imagine that there will be many potential conflicts that will arise, such as land-grabbing caused by the politics of the state administration. There will also be an exodus of people to the new capital which will certainly trigger conflict with local people."

"Well, this is our paradigm of development, which tends to sacrifice the interests of small people for the sake of the elites. On many occasions, here, development means sacrificing the poor/small people. In this case, they are being sacrificed solely for the sake of an 'image or impression,' as if they were not human beings with dignity."

While the propaganda that is promoting the new capital is all over the Indonesian mass media, here in Kalimantan there is hardly any information, even about the precise location. The area designated by Jokowi's regime is enormous. Everything has been hushed up, camouflaged, covered in secrecy. We ask, and people tell us where to go, but they are not sure. We drive back and forth, frustrated and tired.

On the second day, we finally came to a security post. Behind, the enormous and devastated land can be seen. We are told that it belongs to the retired General Prabowo Subianto, a man who ran against President Widodo in the last elections, in 2019, and after being defeated, was elevated to the post of Minister of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia. A former Lieutenant-General, he was accused of countless violations of human rights, in the territories occupied by Java, and in Jakarta itself, where his troops were involved in kidnapping and torturing student protesters.

Several security guards man the post. One of them is called Hambali, a gate security officer employed by the company *PT. ITCI*, which is owned by Prabowo Subianto himself.

Behind the barrier and the post, there is the vast location of the planned city center of the new capital.

Although in theory, this place is supposed to be "public", after spotting us, the security personnel immediately go to work, asking us questions, checking IDs, making phone calls to some undisclosed locations. Our documents are photocopied.

"So, is this going to be an Indonesian Dubai?" We ask. "Or perhaps Manhattan, or Canberra?"

The senior guard utters laconically, before lifting up the barrier and letting us pass:

"I just hope that the new capital will be built as planned, although I am not sure that the new city will look like Dubai or Canberra or Manhattan."





Pay as You Go: A new privately owned toll road (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

What follows is a nightmare, combined with Kafkaesque, grotesque images. Indonesia always manages to surprise, and to shock me.

First, on the road shoulder, there are several broken trucks, full of timber. The drivers and helpers are busy fixing their engines and tires. Flies and other insects are everywhere. Indiscriminate logging is obviously going on, up to now.

Our car moves on; begins climbing the rolling hills. The devastation is appalling, even by the standards of Borneo/ Kalimantan. Entire hills have been deforested, scarred. Huge, monstrous stubs of enormous trees line up the road. There are all sorts of makeshift 'reforestation' projects, obviously conducted to impress the local media. The result of all this is terrifying. The higher we get, the greater the scale of destruction: the total ruin of the island can be seen for tens of kilometers, in every direction. If this was once, decades and centuries ago, a paradise, it is now hell.

On top of all this, stands a small metal structure, called *Sudarmono Tower*, put together in the most amateurish manner. It is supposed to resemble the Eiffel Tower. Local people drive here; they climb it; adults, children, even grandmothers. There is nothing else to do, in this part of the world: the villages are encircled by palm oil plantations, mines and other commercial ventures. Now they have new entertainment – me. They stare, point fingers, repeating, as they always do when they see a foreigner: “*bule, bule*” (derogatory for “albino”).



Le Tower de Kalimantan Nouveau – at the very center of the new capital (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

We approached Ms. Imah, who was visiting the tower together with her family. She is from Sepaku Dua. She has no idea about politics, or about the ‘colonizing and then plundering’ of Kalimantan. If anything, she is one of the ‘colonizers’, but definitely not one of those who improved their lives by moving to the island. She knows nothing about the ‘grand plan’. Or, she knows very little. All she worries about are insignificant details: noise and possible overcrowding:

“This is my first time visiting the location of the planned center of the capital. Personally, I am worried about the relocation of the new capital to our village. Now, we live in a quiet and peaceful environment. I am sure there will be more and more people coming and it will become crowded.”

She does not know that she is living in thorough misery. Almost nobody around here, or even in the middle of the monstrous Jakarta and Surabaya slums, realize their conditions. ‘Quiet and peaceful’, she describes her environment. Wooden shacks, a medical and education system near the hard sub-Saharan African bottom, an entire island robbed, with more than 100% of its land (yes, you are reading correctly) sold to private businesses.

Ms Ponadi, a shop owner, from Sepaku Village, thinks only about the possible compensation. But she is not even sure that the compensation will be provided by the government:

“We came to this village decades ago, as trans-migrants, who started a new life from scratch. Now I already have enough land to pass on to my daughters and sons. Honestly, I would not be willing if we were told to move, to another place. If we had to move, the government would have to provide adequate compensation, for the hard-earned lives we have built here for decades.”

This land she is talking about used to belong to this island, and to the people of this island. But she does not understand. First, the fascist government sent them here, to spread their culture and religion, all around this island, which used to be inhabited by enormous, advanced and clearly socialist cultures. Now, the Javanese regime wants to cash in on its ‘investment’. Ms. Ponadi concludes, somehow sarcastically:

“How could they possibly be able to build a city like Dubai here? I am not convinced at all. Tall buildings will immediately collapse to the ground”.

She laughs, loudly. We don’t. All this is not funny. It is, somehow, damn serious.

We drive through Borneo, exhausted, depressed, and with the feeling that something terrible is once again taking place here.

For almost three years we have been filming and talking to people, all over this tremendous island, the 3rd largest on Earth, after Greenland and Papua. We have been documenting mighty rivers like Kapuas, now poisoned by mercury, hills leveled to the ground by mining companies, tremendous sprawls of land deforested, and converted into palm oil plantations. Chemicals, black carcinogenic creeks, and filth, are everywhere. Coal barges exporting the bowels of the island to all corners of the world. Villages and towns surrounded by monstrous commercial enterprises. Beaches covered by concrete, and then abandoned. Children playing in the middle of the roads. Sick people running, escaping to the Malaysian part of the island, where the medical care is much better and cheaper.

For almost three years, we have been collecting material for a huge documentary film, and a book.

The world knows nothing about Borneo; or almost nothing. Yet, its demise is as important as that of Amazonia. And the destruction is much more rapid here, than anything recorded in Brazil.

Our nerves are stretched. It is all one big insanity, and we are alone, totally alone in this: no support and no backing. And this huge, enormous country all around us, choking us. The Fourth most populous nation on Earth, totally indoctrinated by the pro-Western, pro-business regime, with hardly any diversity, with no mercy, no production and hardly any enthusiasm. A country that only consumes, and which lives off cutting down trees, polluting rivers and selling its riches to multi-national companies.

A Balinese thinker, Gung Alit, wrote a comment for this report:

“I do not agree with moving the capital to Kalimantan, because I prefer the forest to be sustainable. Even now they are already destroyed, so what would the forests look like if they really move the capital? Kalimantan Island would be more devastated. And once it gets more devastated, they will move again.

That is ridiculous.”

Yes, they always move again. They come like locust, from Java, supported by Western, foreign, companies. They stay for as long as there is something to plunder. Then, they move again. It is because Indonesia does not produce, it only plunders, and buys toys for the rich, after selling the loot. It is a terribly frightening sight. Everything is make-believe: statistics lie, planners lie. The country has been ransacked, by less than 1% of the population.



Deforestation and desolation marks the new center of the future capital city (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)



Rainforests are still being clear cut, with no end in sight (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)



Clear cut: making way for the new Indonesia capital city location, the new Kalimantan? (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)



In the area of the new Indonesia capital – a palm oil and chemical apocalypse (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

And now, the Indonesian President, a megalomaniac, little businessman from Surakarta (Solo) is dreaming about something really huge. He is like some African king who drains his national resources, in order to build a useless, huge palace or a cathedral in the middle of the jungle.

The Diplomat published an article on April 3, 2020, by By Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat and Dimas Permadi. It contains two interesting paragraphs:

“It is also important to note that domestically Jokowi’s plan to move the capital has been a contentious issue, which has taken a toll on the president’s image. In fact, a survey carried out by the KedaikOPI survey institute revealed that 95.7 percent of Jakartans reject the plan. Scholars have also argued that the plan is not feasible and would not solve the underlying issues the government aims to address.”

Naturally, to “elevate” the project, Jokowi selected several unsavory individuals:

“To realize this gigantic plan, Jokowi formed a new capital steering board consisting of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.”

Jokowi says he loves business, and he is enamored with the U.S. president Donald Trump. He can hardly believe that from a furniture seller he has gone ‘so far’, meeting the most notorious leaders of the West, shaking their hands, telling them how much they are wanted in Indonesia.

He talks big. He shuts up his critics. Journalists and activists are disappearing, or outrightly

getting murdered. Laws muzzling any criticism are being introduced, gradually and consistently. Nobody dares to guess what may come next. *New Order* (“Ode Baru”) – the fascist pro-business regime of General Suharto, is being re-introduced.

In this political climate; in a climate of fear, intimidation and corruption, the new capital city of Indonesia is expected to rise.

As we sit in a car, in silence, driving towards Balikpapan City, my left eye begins to ache. It is just the beginning of a horror which I will have to face in just two weeks from now. My stomach has been destroyed, as always when I work in Indonesia, particularly in Kalimantan. Soon, both eyes, attacked by a local parasite, will collapse. It will happen in Hong Kong. And I will have to fly home, to Chile, half-blind and ruined after working in Kalimantan. My [journey will take 8 days](#); from Hong Kong to Bangkok, to Seoul, Amsterdam, Surinam, Brazil and Peru.



On board Lion Air – the world’s most cramped and deadliest airline (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

In a few weeks, COVID-19 will come to Indonesia, but instead of mobilizing, Jokowi’s regime will tell its citizens to pray and drink herbal medicine. In such a situation, a tremendous amount of people may die, silently, and as always in Indonesia, unreported.

But now we slowly progressed towards the main regional center, and its airport. Ahead of us, there will be a horrid flight to Pontianak, in two days, on a filthy and overcrowded Boeing 737, so filthy that it resembles an old bus in some collapsed country. Then, a flight to Jakarta on the national carrier *Garuda Indonesia*, where several people sat around us would be emitting dry, persistent coughs. Unlike in the Philippines, Vietnam and of course China, no temperature checking, no medical checkpoints, until much, much later.

Indonesia is a collapsed country. I depicted it in my documentary [film](#) “DOWNFALL!” The fact that it has crumbled is a well-hidden secret. If it does something really well, it obstructs the truth, tricking its own citizens and the world. It shows its true face only when emergencies strike, as basically nothing works there: rescue operations, the medical system, or transportation.



Indonesia: with such workers – good luck building the new capital (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

Before leaving Balikpapan, we talked to several individuals there. Although in Indonesia, more than half of the population lives in misery (if international statistics were to apply), people here apply standardized neocon “logic”. Even in the slums, all over the archipelago, people use stock market jargon. It looks unnatural, terrifying, perverse.

Lusi (known, like most people in Indonesia, by only one name), a housewife, a visitor to the *Mall Pentacity*, in Balikpapan, readily offered her “analyses”:

“I agree and support the relocation of the capital. It will boost economic development, especially in the property businesses.”

Would she, personally, participate in the “economic development and property business”? When asked, she did not know what to say.

Mr. Arip Harahap, a senior architect, based in Jakarta, declared for this report, that moving the capital from Jakarta to Kalimantan, is “immoral”. He elaborated:

“First, it is not based on a proper planning and design process. All technical, socio-cultural studies are still too shallow. Second, considering the country’s economic situation, it is such a wasteful way of spending a budget. Third, it seems that there are the interests of groups close to the central government that will benefit from the project.”

Apparently, there are many such interests, of many groups close to the government. As the government and such groups are intertwined, forming one system, a regime, which has been, for long decades, cannibalizing the nation.

The *Jakarta Globe* continued its damning report, naming names:

“The corporations and the oligarchs have a chance to ensure their investments are safe with this project. Meanwhile, they ignore the fact the indigenous Paser Balik tribe had their land taken away by ITCI Hutan Manunggal in the 1960s,” Jatam coordinator Merah Johansyah said at the report’s launch in Jakarta on Tuesday.

The names mentioned in the report include lumber businessman Sukanto Tanoto, the owner of ITCI Hutan Manunggal; Hashim Djojohadikusumo, Prabowo’s younger brother; Rheza Herwindo, the son of corruption convict and ex-House speaker Setya Novanto; Thomas Aquinas Djiwandono, the treasurer of the Gerindra Party and Prabowo’s nephew; lawyer and ex-Justice Minister Yusril Ihza Mahendra; and the ubiquitous Luhut.

President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo announced the location of the new capital city, at Penajam Paser Utara in East Kalimantan, on April 29, only 12 days after he won the presidential election.

“The government never asked for approval from the people of East Kalimantan. The decision [to move the capital there] was taken 12 days after the presidential election without consulting the public. That was a crime as far as public participation in politics is concerned,” Merah said.”

Investigating oppression against the indigenous people in Indonesia, as well as the destruction of the environment all over the archipelago by the collusion of local oligarchs, foreign multi-nationals and Indonesian government, is an extremely dangerous job, particularly now, under Jokowi’s administration. People get hunted down, killed, arrested and in the case of foreigners, regularly deported.

Recently, Philip Jacobson, 30, was arrested and imprisoned in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, after attending meetings of the indigenous people of Kalimantan, and reporting for *Mongabay*.

The Environmental science website, *Mongabay*, is an outspoken publication, that is persistently critical of the situation in Indonesia. Regarding the new capital, it reported on 6 January, 2020:

“The site of the new capital on the island of Borneo is home to 162 existing concessions, most of them for coal mining, according to a report from a

coalition of NGOs. This contradicts the government's claim that the city will be built on vacant land, and raises the prospect of the concession-holders exploiting the opportunity for profit, said Merah Johansyah from the Mining Advocacy Network (Jatam), one of the NGOs in the coalition.

"If the government says it's going to be the public who will benefit [from relocating the capital], that's a big lie," he said at the launch of the report in Jakarta. "The ones that will benefit are these companies."



Misery yes, but TV is always there (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

And so, the story goes. Six decades of attempts to move the Indonesian capital, from Jakarta to Kalimantan on the island of Borneo. First, the enthusiastic effort by President Sukarno, to raise the socialist, Soviet-style city of Palangkaraya in Central Kalimantan, literally in the middle of nowhere. Then, the U.S.-backed fascist coup put a full stop to all the progressive aspirations and people-oriented development. Recently, after getting re-elected, Jokowi announced his grand plan to abandon the polluted, embarrassingly poor and 'sinking' Jakarta, and move the capital city to Penajam Paser Utara in East Kalimantan.

Unlike the left-wing vision of Sukarno, Jokowi's design is nihilistic, and if implemented, it will benefit only big business and the oligarchs. The great majority of the Indonesian people will gain absolutely nothing.

The great migration of morally and economically corrupt bureaucrats and their butlers from Jakarta to East Kalimantan, would further damage the already extremely devastated island. Native people there will get more and more marginalized and oppressed. If this happens, there will also be very little chance for them to ever regain control of their own island.



Container ships ready to take away loot from Kalimantan, to richer waters (Image: Andre Vltchek © 2020)

As this report is being written, the Indonesian economy is collapsing, due to the COVID-19 epidemic. Even before the *lockdowns*, the commodity-based economy of the fourth most populous nation was not doing well. Now the situation is truly shattering now.

Statistics in Indonesia are manipulated and are totally incorrect. In reality, the majority of the nation lives below international poverty lines, living in urban and rural slums, lacking basic sanitation, access to clean water, decent medical care, healthy and nutritious food, education and housing.

Can Indonesia afford to waste 33 billion dollars on moving its capital city? And everyone knows that 33 billion will at some point inflate to 50 billion, then perhaps to one trillion, until we will all lose count. If the project goes ahead, it will be nothing more than yet another re-distribution of the national wealth – delivering billions of dollars into the hands of very few corrupt oligarchs and so-called "elites".

The 'project' should stop. It has to stop, but can it still be stopped?

In Indonesia, the greed of the rulers is much greater than logic. Most of the citizens are uninformed, lethargic and submissive. People are resigned.

Will the new capital ever get built? So far, there is only the tiny fake Eiffel Tower sticking up towards the sky, surrounded by plundered nature. Almost nothing moves. There is almost total silence there, as if it were the silence before the storm.

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Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His latest books are: "Exposing Lies Of The Empire" and "Fighting Against Western Imperialism". Discussion with Noam Chomsky: On Western Terrorism. Point of No Return is his critically acclaimed political novel. Oceania - a book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific. His provocative book

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