

INDONESIA'S ISLANDS DISAPPEAR - ECOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE AT HAND



Indonesia is a vast country which comprises of thousands of islands. However, these tend to disappear almost without notice and 'sand pirates' come freely to steal gravel and sand to be sold to many of the Asian developers.

Asia has been for many years experiencing a major boom in construction industry; cities emerge with impressive speed and China or Thailand are safe havens for many new developers. With so many projects currently underway, there is a constant need for construction material and such tempting business attracts a lot of crooks. **A very appalling trend has appeared, where the so-called 'sand pirates' come freely and steal sand and gravel to sell to Asian developers.**

People of the Sebesi Island were thrilled when a businessman approached them several years ago with a proposal. Sebesi lies very close to the infamous volcanic island of Krakatoa, which exploded in 1883, killing 36,000 people. For over a century, a new volcano, 'a child of Krakatoa', has been growing again by a shocking 1 cm a day. Sebesi inhabitants have a reason to be concerned. When a businessman appeared with a promise to build protection for their island, the locals were thrilled. Soon, they realized what a mistake it had been. Instead of protecting it, the businessman is stealing their island away.

Sebesi is not the only island affected by thieves. **In fact, 24 islands have disappeared since 2005 in Indonesia.** The official government policy is very strict, threatening to shoot pirates on sight. However, the reality is very different. Corrupt officials keep a blind eye on the thieves and local population is increasingly worried about the impact of such dirty activities. They impact the entire area which depends on fishing and tourism.

Unless the government starts seriously fighting corruption and the sand pirates, an ecological catastrophe is inevitable. However, locals are well aware of the risks and are very angry. It might not take long before they start attacking the pirates themselves.

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