

Brief Introduction to Historical View of Papua New Guinea

Ibraheem Mikail Abiola¹
International Islamic University Malaysia
ibraheem_abiola@yahoo.com

Abstract

Papua New Guinea is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world; it is a Commonwealth realm; in which Queen Elizabeth II acts as its Sovereign and Head of State. It was expected by the constitutional convention, which prepared the draft constitution, and by Australia, the outgoing metropolitan power, that Papua New Guinea would choose not to retain its link with the Commonwealth monarchy. Strong growth in Papua New Guinea's mining and resource sector has led to the country becoming the sixth fastest-growing economy in the world as of 2011. Meanwhile, this paper present the brief introduction to historical view of Papua New Guinea (PNG).

1.1.1 LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, just north of Australia, and many outlying islands. The Indonesian province of West Papua (Irian Jaya) is to the west. To the north and east are the islands of Manus, New Britain, New Ireland, and Bougainville, all forming a part of Papua New Guinea.² About one-tenth larger than California, its mountainous interior has only recently been explored. Two major rivers, the Sepik and the Fly, are navigable by shallow-draft vessels.³

The population of Papua New Guinea was 3.1 million in 1983 and increased to 5 million in 1999.⁴ At present, the total population of Papua New Guinea is 6 million with Muslims estimated as only 1% of the population. Comprising many different tribal and ethnic groups, the population is increasing at an estimated rate of 2.4% per annum. The great majority of the population lives as subsistence farmers in small villages which are difficult of access.⁵ There are few roads, travel being mainly by air and small boat. There is a marked urban drift partly inhibited by the extreme difficulty in obtaining urban employment. Urban unemployment is high and rising, a major cause of serious law and order problems. The capital city, Port Moresby has a population of half a million (500,000). It is the national capital district and lies on the south coast. It connects with other parts of the country by air and marine craft.⁶ Although English is the official major language and is widely taught and spoken, the country has so many different dialects many of which are common use. After English, Pidgin English and Motu are the main lingua franca.

1.1.2 POLITICAL HISTORY

The first inhabitants of the island of New Guinea were Papuan, Melanesian, and Negrito tribes, who spoke more than 700 distinct languages. The eastern half of New Guinea was first explored by Spanish and Portuguese adventurers in the 16th century. In 1828, the Dutch formally took possession of the western half of the island (now the province of West Papua [Irian Jaya], Indonesia). In 1885, Germany formally annexed the northern coast and Britain took similar action in the south. In 1906, Britain transferred its rights over British New Guinea to the newly independent Australia, and the name of the territory was changed to the Territory of Papua. Australian troops invaded German New Guinea (called Kaiser-Wilhelm land) in World War I and gained control of the territory under a League of Nations mandate.⁷ New Guinea and some of Papua were invaded by Japanese forces in 1942. After being liberated by the Australians in 1945⁸, it became a United Nations trusteeship, administered by Australia. The territories were combined and called the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The Papua and New Guinea Act, passed in Australia in 1949, confirmed the administrative union of New Guinea and Papua under the title of 'The Territory of Papua and New Guinea and placed it under the International Trusteeship System.

¹ Ibraheem Mikail Abiola. A PhD student at International Islamic University Malaysia studied previously at Islamic university of Medina, Saudi Arabia.

² John, D. Waiko. *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*. Australia: Oxford University Press.(1993). 86.

³ Ibid, 87.

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency.http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurrent/papua_new_guinea/index.html.

⁵ Sadiiq,Sandbach.*Papua New Guinea & Islam*.Library of Islamic Society of Papua New Guinea. (1997). 2.

⁶ M.S.A Chowdhury. *Master plan Port Moresby Islamic centre*. Library of Islamic society of Papua New Guinea. (1997). 3.

⁷ John, D. Waiko.*A Short History of Papua New Guinea*. Australia: Oxford University Press. (1993). 91.

⁸ J.F. O'Connell,"Dating the colonization of Sahul (Pleistocene Australia–New Guinea): a review of recent research". *Journal of Archaeological Science*. (2004). 835–853.

The Act provided for a Legislative Council (established in 1951), a judicial organization, a public service, and a system of local government. In 1963 the first House of Assembly, replaced the Legislative Council. Later independence from Australia was proclaimed in 1975 and Somare became the first Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.¹



¹ Theo, Aerts. *The Martyrs of Papua New Guinea. 333 Missionary Lives Lost During World War II.* (2ndedn), Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea Press. (1994). 79.

² Source: Political map of Papua New Guinea (1999). <Http www.commonwealth.ns.ca.



Papua New Guinea is a Commonwealth country.² The Queen is represented by the Governor-General of Papua New Guinea, currently Michael Ogio. Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are unusual among Commonwealth realms in that Governors-General are selected by the legislature rather than by the executive branch. Actual executive power lies with the Prime Minister, who heads the cabinet of 31 MPs from the ruling coalition, which make up the government.³ The current Prime Minister is Peter O'Neill.

The unicameral National Parliament has 111 seats, of which 22 are occupied by the governors of the 21 provinces (2 new ones were approved by Parliament in 2012) and the National Capital District (NCD). Candidates for members of parliament are voted upon when the prime minister asks the Governor-General to call a national election, a maximum of five years after the previous national election.⁴

¹ Source: Political map of Papua New Guinea (1999). <Http www.commonwealth.ns.ca.

² Bradford, Sarah. *A Biography of Britain's Queen Elizabeth*. Riverhead book press, (1997). 19.

³ John, D. Waiko. *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*. Australia: Oxford University Press. (1993). 91.

⁴ Dorney, Sean. *Papua New Guinea: People, Politics and History Since 1975* ABC BOOK Press (1990). 182.

In the early years of independence, the instability of the party system led to frequent votes of no confidence in Parliament with resulting changes of the government of the day. In recent years, successive governments have passed legislation preventing such votes sooner than 18 months after a national election and within 12-month of the next election. This restriction on votes of no confidence has arguably resulted in greater stability, although perhaps at a cost of reducing the accountability¹ of the executive branch of government.

In foreign policy, Papua New Guinea is a member of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) of countries and was accorded Observer status within ASEAN in 1976, followed later by Special Observer status in 1981.² It is also a member of Asia-Pacific Economic country (APEC) and an Africa, Caribbean and Pacific group of states (ACP), associated with the European Union.³

Economically, a rapid expanding list of gold and petroleum discoveries has revived Papua New Guinea's hope of faster economic growth from mineral production. It is estimated that by 1992 Papua New Guinea's gold output would increase from 35/ tonnes a year to about 75/ tonnes annually. Papua New Guinea sits in the centre of volcanic chain of Islands stretching from Indonesia down to New Zealand which some geologists believe could be littered with accessible deposits of epithermal gold washed up with hot springs. A commercial oil recovery would have been more dramatic impact on a country whose current exports total about one billion Kina a year and whose internal government revenue was put at 650 million Kina for late 1980s. Long known of the search shows the high hopes in an area of depressed oil prices.⁴ The most promising discovery is the Lagifu field being explored by a US Australian consortium led by Nuigini Gulf oil. After two wells yielded high flows, Nuigini Gulf is extending out to see if reserves justify the high cost of development, probably US \$1 billion including 140km pipeline out to the Papuan gulf.⁵

In the second most important export category, receipts from tea crops also seemed likely to drop back from 1986, when Papua New Guinea benefited greatly from the failure of Brazil's harvest and resulting high world price. Coffee export receipts were up to 209 million Kina in 1990, entirely countering a severe slump in palm oil earnings. Papua New Guinea's external payment position improved in 1986 with the current account deficit down to 183 million Kina from 197 million Kina in 1985, but the worst suddenly in the first quarter of 1987⁶, showing a current account deficit of 116 million Kina. In short term, the new mining developments seemed likely to bring a high import bill before export earning began to flow around 1990.⁷ The country suffered a major economic set back during 1994 with some resultant political instability. The economic situation has declined since then. Recovery is not yet in sight.⁸

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¹ Ibid.

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⁶ Ibid. 113.

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