

Chapter 1

Political Background

Papua New Guinea was formed by the merger of the Territory of Papua, which had been under Australian rule from 1906, and the Trust Territory of New Guinea, which had been a German colonial territory from 1884 to 1918.

Comprising the eastern section of the island of New Guinea and about 600 smaller islands, including the island of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea was administered by Australia under a League of Nations mandate granted in 1919 and then under UN trusteeship from 1945. In 1949, Australia brought the two territories under a unified administration. The Territory of Papua New Guinea became internally self-governing in December 1973 and achieved full independence on 16 September 1975, as the Independent State of Papua New Guinea.

Since independence, Papua New Guinea has expanded the development of its considerable mineral resources. Most of the population, however, continues to be engaged in agriculture – cash crops such as coffee for export and subsistence farming. Papua New Guinea has close relations with its former colonial power, Australia, but has been attempting to broaden its international contacts particularly in South-East Asia. It is a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum, the South Pacific Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group. Papua New Guinea consists of 19 provinces and a national capital district. The capital is Port Moresby. Traditional forms of social organisation play an important part in Papua New Guinean society and have significant political as well as cultural and social influence.

Political Developments Since Independence

Politics in Papua New Guinea in the post-independence period has been characterised by coalition governments drawing support from a number of political parties and independent MPs. Political allegiances are largely based on locality and personal ties, rather than ideology. The party system is relatively weak and the system is marked by shifting loyalties and frequent floor crossing by MPs. A significant proportion of elected MPs – and an even larger proportion of candidates – are independents. There have been few women MPs since independence and no women have been elected since 1982.

Prior to the 1997 general election there had been four elections since independence. An interim coalition government which had been elected in 1972 remained in power until 1977. Elections were held in that year and then in 1982, 1987 and 1992. By 1997 there had been eight governments. No single party had ever governed in its own right and a series of no-confidence motions had resulted in frequent mid-term changes of government.

On independence, Sir Michael Somare, leader of the Pangu Pati, formed the first governing coalition with the People's Progress Party (PPP), and later with the United Party. In 1980, a no-confidence motion moved by Sir Julius Chan, leader of the PPP, resulted in Sir Michael Somare losing his premiership. At the 1982 elections, Sir Michael Somare and his Pangu Pati defeated Sir Julius Chan and Sir Michael became Prime Minister again.

In 1985, following the defeat of a challenge against Sir Michael Somare, the deputy leader of the Pangu Pati, Mr Paias Wingti, broke away and subsequently founded a new political party, known as the People's Democratic Movement. In the same year, Mr Wingti assumed office as Prime Minister following a no-confidence motion introduced by Sir Julius Chan. At the 1987 elections, Mr Wingti again became Prime Minister when he successfully formed a multi-party coalition, thereby securing a parliamentary majority of three votes. In early 1988 Sir Michael Somare was replaced as leader of the Pangu Pati by his deputy, Sir Rabbie Namaliu. In the same year Sir Rabbie Namaliu defeated Mr Wingti and formed a new coalition government.

The Constitution was amended in 1991 so that a no-confidence motion in the Prime Minister could no longer be proposed until he or she had completed 18 months in office. An amendment

was also incorporated into the Constitution which allowed for the early dissolution of Parliament, rather than a change of government, if a no-confidence motion was won within the last 12 months of a term of Parliament.

Following the 1992 elections, Mr Wingti was elected Prime Minister, defeating Sir Rabbie Namaliu on the strength of the casting vote of the Speaker. In 1993, Mr Wingti called a snap parliamentary ballot on leadership which resulted in his immediate re-election as Prime Minister. Widespread protest at his action and a Supreme Court ruling in 1994 which declared his re-election invalid, led to Mr Wingti's resignation and a new parliamentary leadership vote. Sir Julius Chan of the PPP defeated the Speaker, Mr Bill Skate, leader of the People's National Congress, and formed a governing coalition with the Pangu Pati and the League for National Advancement (LNA).

In 1996, Sir Michael Somare formed a separate alliance – the National Alliance – supported initially by 11 MPs. This led to differences between himself and the Pangu Pati which he had founded in 1975.

Recent Developments

The months immediately prior to the 1997 general election were dominated by a political crisis occasioned by the decision of the Government to intensify its efforts to secure a military resolution to the attempted secession of the island of Bougainville.

The attempted secession of Bougainville, the main island in the North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea, began when landowners there took up arms in 1988, following what they regarded as an unsatisfactory response to their claims for compensation from an Australian company mining copper on the island. The Panguna mine had been in operation since 1964, and in 1988 accounted for around 20 per cent of Papua New Guinea government revenues and around 44 per cent of the country's exports.

The secession attempt was led by an organisation styling itself the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and the ensuing conflict led eventually to the indefinite closure of the mine and a significant loss of revenue to the Papua New Guinea Government. The conflict then escalated and it is estimated that thousands of lives have been lost to date. The conflict also damaged the economy, overstretched the security forces and strained relations with neighbouring countries.

In an effort to finally resolve the conflict by military means, a number of attempts at negotiation having failed, the Papua New Guinea Government decided in January 1997 to hire a UK-based company, Sandline International. The Government stated that Sandline would train members of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). Critics claimed that foreign mercenaries would be used in action in Bougainville. The contract, which was reportedly worth US\$35 million led to international and domestic protest. The then Commander of the PNGDF, Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok, came out in opposition to the contract and called for the resignation of the Prime Minister and senior Ministers. Members of the PNGDF and others protested on the streets of Port Moresby and the mercenaries were expelled from the country. In a subsequent parliamentary debate Prime Minister Chan defeated a motion calling for his resignation, which was later amended for him to step aside. Subsequently, Sir Julius Chan decided to stand aside in favour of an Acting Prime Minister, Mr John Giheno, while a Commission of Inquiry investigated the Sandline events. This Commission reported to the Acting Prime Minister during the general election campaign. The Sandline events further fuelled the national debate about the way in which Papua New Guinea is governed.

Political Parties

Twenty political parties registered prior to the 1997 general election:

Christian Country Party	Leader	Avusi Tanao
Christian Democratic Party	Chairman	Dilu D Goma
Hausman Pati	Leader	Waim Tokam
Liberal Party	Leader	Thomas Pupun

Melanesian Alliance Party	Leader	John Momis
Melanesian Labour Party	Leader	Dr Paul Mondia
Milne Bay Party	Leader	Simon Mumurik
Movement for Greater Autonomy	Leader	Steven Pokawin
National Alliance Party	Leader	Sir Michael Somare
National Party	Leader	Philip Kapal
Pangu Pati	Leader	Chris Haiveta
Papua New Guinea First	Leader	John Gundu
People's Action Party	Leader	Ted Diro
People's Democratic Movement	Leader	Paias Wingti
People's National Congress	Leader	Bill Skate
People's Progress Party	Leader	Sir Julius Chan
People's Resources Awareness Party	Leader	Michael Uvilio
People's Solidarity Party	Leader	Kala Swokin
People's Unity Party	Leader	David Unagi
United Party	Leader	Rimbink Pato

At the 1992 general election the tally of seats gained by party-endorsed candidates was as follows, while 31 seats were gained by independents:

Pangu Pati	22
People's Democratic Movement	15
People's Action Party	13
People's Progress Party	10
Melanesian Alliance	9
League for National Advancement	5
National Party	2
Melanesian United Front	1

None of the 20 political parties is easy to characterise in ideological terms. Five of these parties have participated in coalition governments, but three have emerged as having had particularly important roles in several of the eight coalition governments since independence: the People's Progress Party, Pangu Pati and the People's Democratic Movement. In addition, many also considered that, although only recently formed, the National Alliance (led by former Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare) would also be an important contestant in the 1997 general election.

People's Progress Party (PPP) – led by Sir Julius Chan, Prime Minister immediately prior to the 1997 general election. The PPP has participated in six coalition governments and has led two. In the 1997 elections the party endorsed candidates for 74 of the 109 seats. The PPP has traditionally been perceived as a party which is supportive of business and economic development. During the campaign Sir Julius Chan promised the reintroduction of a land mobilisation or registration programme, to enable landowners to participate fully in the economy by using land as security for bank loans.

Pangu Pati – led by Mr Chris Haiveta, Deputy Prime Minister in the government which left office following the Sandline crisis. The Pangu Pati has led three coalition governments since independence. In the 1997 elections the party contested 90 of the 109 seats, including 26 of the 29 seats in its traditional regional base of the Momase region.

People's Democratic Movement (PDM) – led by Mr Paias Wingti, a former Prime Minister. The PDM has led three coalition governments since independence. In the 1997 elections the party supported candidates for 61 seats. The PDM concentrated its campaigning on a policy of 'free education', promising free education from elementary school to Grade 12.

People's Action Party (PAP) – led by Mr Ted Diro, a former Deputy Prime Minister. In the 1997

elections 105 candidates were aligned with the party or its leader. The party endorsed multiple candidates in its traditional regional base – the Papuan region. One major PAP theme in the 1997 election campaign was its proposal for the introduction of a federal system of government, with the national government controlling only foreign affairs, defence and finance.

National Alliance (NA) – led by former Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare. The National Alliance endorsed 71 candidates in the 1997 elections. During the campaign the party emphasised the need for good government, opposition to corruption and the strengthening of provincial government.

Melanesian Alliance (MA) – led by Mr John Momis, a former Minister and MP for the North Solomons Province since 1975. The party sponsored 35 candidates in the 1997 elections and was closely aligned with the National Alliance in the campaign.