



The Democratic Republic of Laloku

General

Named after the powerful Laloku river flowing through its southern part, the Democratic Republic of Laloku is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, with over 80% of its territory covered by the Paturi desert, and much of the rest threatened by periodic drought and desertification. The economy is concentrated around subsistence and some export agriculture clustered in the more fertile south, and the export of raw materials—especially uranium ore. Laloku remains handicapped by its landlocked position, poor education, infrastructure, health care, and environmental degradation.

Lalokian society reflects a great diversity drawn from the long independent histories of its several ethnic groups and regions and their relatively short period living in a single state. Historically, what is now Laloku has been on the fringes of several large states. Since independence, Lalokians have lived under five constitutions and three periods of military rule, but have maintained elected multiparty rule since 1999. The vast majority of the population practices the Shuntu religion. A majority live in rural areas, and have little access to advanced education.

History

While most of what is now Laloku has been subsumed into the inhospitable Paturi desert in the last two thousand years, five thousand years ago the north of the country consisted of fertile grasslands. Populations of pastoralists have left paintings of abundant wildlife, domesticated animals, chariots, and a complex culture that dates back to at least 10,000 BCE, as witnessed in numerous caves and other archaeological sites throughout the country. Several leading archaeologists have even identified modern day Laloku as the possible point of origin for modern human society, making Laloku a highly sought-after location for archaeological expeditions.



Flag

Anthem: La Lalokienne

Capital
(and largest city)

Miyani

Official languages

French, English, Asufa,
Marza, Kanobi

Until the 19th century, control over what is modern-day Laloku varied between several regional tribal kingdoms and empires. Most notable of these were the Punaki empire, which ruled over parts of modern Laloku between 1137 and 1470, and the Minari dynasty which succeeded it, and reigned for another four centuries. The Minari period is immortalized in modern Laloku's flag, which figures a prominent fierce lion, the emblem of King Minar the First (1470-1515), also known as the "Lion of the Desert".

In the 19th century, contact with the West began when the first European explorers (from Germany and Britain) toured the area, searching for the source of the Laloku river and for extremely valuable archaeological artifacts. Commencing from the mid-1800's it was the French who gradually managed to gain more and more control over Laloku. Thus, in 1900, the French were able to declare the establishment of the Territoire Militaire des Pays et Protectorats du Laloku. Most of the local tribes viewed this gradual French take-over with suspicion, and clashes between French troops and the local population were common. Although French efforts at "pacification" began before 1900, dissident ethnic groups, especially the desert Gureta tribe, were not fully subdued until 1922, when Laloku became a full-fledged French colony. French rule in Laloku was characterised by an absence of policies to unify the territory and sluggish modernisation, as the French primarily viewed the colony as a relatively unimportant source of untrained labour. The colonial administration in Laloku was continuously severely understaffed and had to rely on the dregs of the French civil service. Only the south was governed reasonably effectively, while French presence in the north and east was nominal.

Laloku's colonial history and development parallel that of other French colonial territories in the region. France administered its colonies through a governor general in neighbouring Lagesa, and governors in the individual territories, including Laloku. After World War II, France granted Laloku the status of overseas territory and its inhabitants the right to elect representatives to the French National Assembly and a Lalokian assembly. The largest political party at the time was the Lalokian Progressive Party (LPT), based in the southern half of the colony. In addition to conferring French citizenship on the inhabitants of the territories, the 1946 French constitution provided for decentralization of power and limited participation in political life for local advisory assemblies.

A further revision in the organization of overseas territories occurred with the passage of the French Overseas Reform Act of July 23, 1956, followed by reorganizing measures enacted by the French Parliament early in 1957. In addition to removing voting inequalities, these laws provided for creation of governmental organs, assuring individual territories a large measure of self-government. After the establishment of the Fifth French Republic on December 4, 1958, Laloku became an autonomous state within the French Community. Following full independence on August 3, 1960, however, membership was allowed to lapse and Laloku became a full independent state.

For its first fourteen years as an independent state, Laloku was run by a single-party civilian regime under the presidency of Ianami Ridoi, a prominent member of the LPT. In 1974, a combination of devastating drought and accusations of rampant corruption

resulted in a coup d'etat that overthrew the Ridoi regime together with the all-powerful and corrupt LPT party. Col. Nisey Tounke and a small military group ruled the country until Tounke's death in 1987. He was succeeded by his Chief of Staff, Col. Sibó, who released political prisoners, liberalized some of Laloku's laws and policies, and promulgated a new constitution, with the creation of a single party constitutional Second Republic. However, President Sibó's efforts to control political reforms failed in the face of union and student demands to institute a multi-party democratic system. The Sibó regime acquiesced to these demands by the end of 1990.

New political parties and civic associations sprang up, and a national peace conference was convened in July 1991 to prepare the way for the adoption of a new constitution and the holding of free and fair elections for all the citizens and residents of Laloku with no distinction between the different tribes and minorities. The debate was often contentious and accusatory, but at the end the conference developed a plan for a transition government. This caretaker government was installed in November 1991 to manage the affairs of state until the institutions of the Third Republic were put into place in April 1993. While the economy deteriorated over the course of the transition, certain accomplishments stand out, including the successful conduct of a constitutional referendum; the adoption of key legislation such as the electoral and rural codes; and the holding of several free, fair, and non-violent nationwide elections. Freedom of the press flourished with the appearance of several new independent newspapers.

The results of the January 1995 parliamentary election meant cohabitation between a rival president and prime minister; this led to governmental paralysis, which provided Col. Brahim Saminar a justification to overthrow the Third Republic in January 1996.

While leading the military authority that ran the government during a 6-month transition period, Saminar enlisted specialists to draft a new constitution for a Fourth Republic announced in May 1996. Saminar organized a presidential election in July 1996. While voting was still going on, he replaced the electoral commission. The new commission declared him the winner after the polls closed. His party thus won 57% of the parliament seats in an obviously flawed legislative election in November 1996.

When his efforts to justify his coup and subsequent questionable elections failed to convince donors to restore multilateral and bilateral economic assistance, a desperate Saminar ignored an international embargo against the Republic of Minabi (where trafficking in slaves is still widely reported) and sought Minabian funds to aid Laloku's economy. In repeated violations of basic civil liberties by the regime, opposition leaders were imprisoned; journalists often arrested, and deported by an unofficial militia composed of police and military; and independent media offices were looted and burned. Some fundamental freedoms, including freedom of the press, were circumscribed. Citizens had little access to media other than the state-owned networks, and most private newspapers struggled to remain open and suffered periodic harassment from the government. At least 18 journalists who had written articles critical of the government were arrested following the 1996 elections on charges of treason and other national security violations.

As part of an initiative started under the 1991 national conference, however, the government signed peace accords in April 1995 with all groups that had been in rebellion since 1990, primarily from the Geruta tribe. The Geruta had claimed they lacked attention and resources from the central government. The government agreed to absorb some former rebels into the military and, with French assistance, help others return to a productive civilian life. An additional important step towards tribal reconciliation was the establishment, in January 1996, of the Ibo Autonomous Region in the south of Laloku. While not fully independent, this new arrangement gave the Ibo some elements of self-rule, including the right to establish their own civil police force (the Ibokado), which is authorized to enforce the law within the autonomous region. Other tribes, including the Geruta, have publicly demanded similar arrangements, while many native Ibo's view the establishment of the autonomous zone just as a first step towards the establishment of a unified Ibo state, encompassing all the Ibo tribal areas in neighbouring states.

On April 9, 1999, Saminar was killed in a coup led by Maj. David Kwan, who established a transitional National Reconciliation Council to oversee the drafting of a constitution for a Fifth Republic with a French style semi-presidential system.

In votes that international observers found to be generally free and fair, the Lalokian electorate approved the new constitution in July 1999 and held legislative and presidential elections in October and November 1999. Heading a multi-party coalition, Douma Tand won the election.

Laloku's new constitution was approved in July 1999. It restored the semi-presidential system of government of the December 1992 constitution (Third Republic) in which the president of the republic, elected for a five-year term, and a prime minister named by the president share executive power. As a reflection of Laloku's increasing population, the unicameral National Parliament was expanded in 2004 to 113 deputies elected for a 5 year term under a majority system of representation. Political parties must attain at least 5% of the vote in order to gain a seat in the legislature.

The constitution also provides for the popular election of municipal and local officials, and the first-ever successful municipal elections took place on July 24, 2004, including in the Ibo Autonomous Region. The National Assembly passed in June 2002 a series of decentralization bills. As a first step, administrative powers will be distributed among 265 communes (local councils); in later stages, regions and departments will be established as decentralized entities. A new electoral code was adopted to reflect the decentralization context. The country is currently divided into 8 regions, which are subdivided into 36 districts (departments). The chief administrator (Governor) in each department is appointed by the government and functions primarily as the local agent of the central authorities.

The current legislature elected in December 2004 contains seven political parties. President Tand was re-elected in December 2004. The new second term government of the Fifth Republic took office on December 30, 2002. In August 2002, serious unrest

within the military occurred in several major towns, but the government was able to restore order within several days.

From 2007 to 2008, the Second Geruta Rebellion took place in northern Laloku, worsening economic prospects and shutting down political progress.

On the 26th May 2009, President Tand dissolved parliament after the country's constitutional court ruled against plans to hold a referendum on whether to allow him a third term in office. According to the Laloku constitution, a new parliament will now have to be elected within six months.

Economy

Laloku is one of the poorest countries in the world, with nearly half of the government's budget being derived from foreign donor resources. Due to recent increases in Uranium prices, Laloku's GDP has risen quite rapidly, currently reaching the level of around \$10 billion. However, this still means that the average GDP per capita remains at around \$800, one of the lowest in the world. The United Nations' Human Development Index claims that 80% of the Lalokian population is below the poverty line. Continued future growth may be sustained by exploitation of oil, gold, coal, and other mineral resources.

The economy of Laloku centers on subsistence crops, livestock, and some of the world's largest uranium deposits. Drought cycles, desertification, a 2.9% population growth rate, and the cyclic changes in world demand for uranium consistently undercut the economy. Years of political instability have scared away foreign investors. Many of those who left Laloku between 1974 and 1996 have only recently begun to regain confidence in the country's future. In 2000 major direct foreign investment in the oil sector began, boosting the country's economic prospects. Conversely, a drought and locust infestation in 2005 led to food shortages for as many as 2.5 million Lalokians.

The agricultural economy is based largely upon internal markets, subsistence agriculture, and the export of raw commodities: food stuffs and cattle to neighbors. Laloku's agricultural and livestock sectors are the mainstay of all but 18% of the population. Fourteen percent of Laloku's GDP is generated by livestock production (camels, goats, sheep and cattle), said to support 29% of the population. Thus 53% of the population is actively involved in crop production. The 15% of Laloku's land that is arable is found mainly along its southern border with Gerinia.

Uranium is Laloku's largest export. Foreign exchange earnings from livestock, although difficult to quantify, are second. Actual exports far exceed official statistics, which often fail to record the movement of large herds of animals across the border. Some hides and skins are exported, and some are transformed into handicrafts. Substantial deposits of phosphates, coal and iron also have been found in Laloku, together with some gold.

The nation enjoyed substantial export earnings and rapid economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s after the opening of its two large uranium mines. When the uranium-led

boom ended in the early 1980s, however, the economy stagnated, and new investment since then has been limited. Recent interest in Uranium has provided hope for an improved economic situation. Laloku's two uranium mines, the open pit mine at Karita and the underground mine at Nelsina, are owned by a French-led consortium and operated by French interests. However, as of 2007, many licenses have been given to other companies from countries such as Canada and Australia in order to exploit new deposits.

Demographics

Over half the population of Laloku belong to the Faluna and the Shongi tribes. Both groups, along with the smaller Ibo tribe, are primarily sedentary farmers who live in the arable, southern tier of the country.

The remainder of Lalokians are nomadic or semi-nomadic livestock-raising peoples - Gureta, Kanuri, and Tobune - who together make up about 20% of Laloku's population. With rapidly growing populations and the consequent competition for meager natural resources, lifestyles of agriculturalists and livestock herders have come increasingly into conflict in Laloku in recent years.

According to the organization Children of the World, Laloku has the world's second highest infant mortality rate. Similarly, the child mortality rate (deaths among children between the ages of 1 and 4) is exceptionally high (248 per 1,000) due to generally poor health conditions and inadequate nutrition for most of the country's children. Nonetheless, Laloku has one of the highest fertility rates in the world (7.0 births per woman); this means that nearly half (49%) of the Lalokien population is under age 15. Between 1996 and 2003, primary school attendance was around 30%, including 36% of males and only 25% of females.

Women lack equal opportunities in education and training, making it difficult for them to compete for the relatively few formal-sector jobs. Although property and inheritance laws based on the French code do not discriminate against women, local leaders adjudicate most inheritance cases in favour of men, according to traditional tribal practice.

Foreign relations

Laloku pursues a moderate foreign policy and maintains friendly relations with the West as well as nonaligned countries. It belongs to the UN and its main specialized agencies. Laloku maintains a special relationship with former colonial power France and enjoys close relations with its regional neighbors, which are all members of the Matapaturi Union. However, a cyclic influx of refugees from neighbouring Letos has been a constant source of disputes between the two states, and the increasing agricultural uses of the waters of the Laloku river, coupled with repeated years of drought, have created sporadic tension with its richer southern neighbour of Gerinia.

Military

The Laloku Armed Forces (Forces Armees Nationales) totals 12,000 personnel with approximately 3,700 gendarmes, 900 air force and 6,000 army personnel. The armed forces include a general staff and battalion task force organizations consisting of two paratroop units, four light armored units, and nine motorized infantry units. The country's small air-force includes one fighter squadron, one ground-attack squadron and two transport squadrons, all flying outdated cold-war era planes dating from the 1970's. Since January 2003, Laloku has deployed a company of troops to UN peacekeeping efforts.

Laloku's defense budget is modest, accounting for about 1.6% of government expenditures. France provides the largest share of military assistance to Laloku. China and Minabi have also provided military assistance. Approximately 15 French military advisers are permanently stationed in Laloku. Many Lalokian military personnel receive training in France, and the Lalokian Armed Forces are equipped mainly with material either given by or purchased in France.