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Introduction to Brunei: A Country Suffering

Located in Southeastern Asia, on the coast of Malaysia, is the country of Brunei . Brunei won its independence from British occupation on January 1, 1984. It is known by many names. The conventional long form of the country is Brunei Darussalam, and the local long form is Negara Brunei Darussalam, both called Brunei for short. Brunei's capital city is Dandar Seri Begawan. This small country has held up quite the fight in order to gain its freedom.

Originally, the sultanate was powerful, but Europeans slowly stopped that. Spain occupied the capital during a short war which Brunei won. In the nineteenth century, Brunei's empire shrank. This is why it currently only occupies a small landmass that is separated into two parts. Britain took over Brunei from 1888 to 1984 for protection. During World War II, Japan occupied the country while Britain ignored the agreement of protection. The rebellion against Britain in the 1960s was put down by the United Kingdom. Now, the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, ASEAN, and Organization of Islamic Conference all welcome Brunei as a member.

Through all of the fighting, this country has managed to keep a sort of order. Brunei has four districts/ provinces, also called daerah, which are Belait, Brunei-Muara, Temburong, and Tutong. Belait being the largest. Brunei-Muara is the northernmost province. Temburong is the easternmost province. Tutong borders Malaysia, Brunei-Muara, and Belait. Each district is further divided into 38 mukims. Completely, the country has an area of 5,766 square kilometers or 2,226 square miles(1). There are four main rivers in Brunei. Each river irrigates one of the provinces of Brunei.

There are about 381,371 people living in Brunei(3). Brunei has a population growth rate of 1.785%(3). For every 1000 people, there are about 18.39 births(3). The death rate is 3.28 deaths per 1000 people(3); the death rate of Swaziland is 30.7 (3).The infant mortality rate is 12.69 deaths per 1000 live births (3), which is low compared to the infant mortality rate of 115.42 deaths per 1000 live births of Niger (9). Brunei has a life expectancy of 75.52 years (3). Overall, the country of Brunei has it made. Its people are expected to live to a decent age and have around two or three children. Citizens of Brunei have access to free healthcare which helps keep the country's population well-developed.

Brunei is mostly made up of Malay, Chinese, and Indigenous people. Because the majority of the population is of Malay descent the official language is Malay. Chinese is also spoken, as well as English because of the British and Australian citizens living in Brunei. The official religion of Brunei is Islam with the sultan as the religious head of the country. Buddhism, Christianity, and some indigenous religions also thrive in Brunei. Some sources say that Brunei lacks religious freedom and freedom of the press.

As mentioned previously, Malay people dominate the country so the culture of Brunei is mostly Malay with Islamic influence. The labor force of Brunei is mostly made up of Indonesian, Filipino, Thai, Indian, Bangla, American, and British people. These foreign workers are found mostly in domestic employment, industry, and education.

In early 1990, Brunei banned the sale and consumption of alcohol. This meant that bars and clubs had to close, but there were still some restaurants that sold alcohol illegally, much like the speak-easys in America of the 1920s. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to bring 12 cans of beer and two bottles of any

other alcohol(5). The prohibition of alcohol was more than likely meant to keep the crime rate down which was already low. There is also rarely any violent crime.

What could the people of Brunei possibly be afraid of? It's a rich country. It has deep pockets to make room for all the money that the oil industry is bringing in. Why would the people of Brunei every be threatened by something? What could all of this money and wealth not get them? The answer is food security. In order to understand the situation completely, one must delve further into the country's economy, specifically its exports and imports.

This constitutional sultanate's economy is mostly a cross between domestic and foreign entrepreneurship. There are government regulations and welfare measures, not to mention, village traditions. Brunei has a per capita Gross Domestic Product of \$51,000 (3), one of the highest in Asia, half of which is obtained through the production of crude oil and natural gas. These also account for more than 90% (3) of the country's exports. It seems to be a perfect country right? Wrong, this is where food security comes into play. Only 0.9%(3) of the entire Gross Domestic Product is from agriculture.

The agricultural products of rice, vegetables, fruits, chickens, water buffalo, cattle, goats, and eggs are not near as beneficial to the country as the industrial products and services of petroleum, petroleum refining, liquefied natural gas, and construction. Only 2.9%(3) of the country works in agricultural fields. The country imports about \$2 billion(3) worth of products, one of which is food. By giving away so much of their land in order to produce crude oil and natural gas, the people of Brunei have given up a freedom, the freedom of self-reliance, the freedom to eat. How is it possible for a country to have a secure food supply if the country itself is not producing it?

Why So Insecure?

Why is Brunei so concerned about food security? It is a wealthy country after all. Brunei exports 205,600 barrels of oil per day. The country has decent birth rates and life expectancies. Why even worry about food security? It all has to do with how Brunei began economically, and how greed got to its farmers.

Brunei was once an agricultural country, full of farm families providing for the country and themselves, in both rural and sub-urban areas. Some of the products they exported were jelutong gum, rubber, rice, fruits, vegetables, eggs, poultry, cattle, buffalo, and goat. In 1973, these farmers were happy providing for their country, so happy, in fact, that they had produced enough rice for the entire country. Two years later, petroleum came into the country and seduced the farmers into becoming part of the industry. Farmers saw more profit and better employment opportunities in this field. Those that continued to farm began to make changes to the production of cash crops. The urban population was demanding more of so few farmers. In order to satisfy the people, the remaining farmers had to start running commercial farms for vegetables, short-term fruits, and poultry. Does this situation sound familiar to anyone else?

It should because it is happening in Iowa. Iowa farmers are not selling their farms so that they can get a piece of the petroleum pie; they are selling their farms to large corporations instead. Teamwork Acres is one of the major corporations buying farmland, especially in southern Iowa. Bill Krause, owner of Teamwork Acres, also owns an ever popular chain of convenience stores, Kum & Go. The situations are similar, but what needs to be done about it?

In order to combat the forces of industry, Brunei created a research and development division to begin researching crops and livestock. The research and development division's main goal was to incorporate technology that was available to farmers. Many advancements took place. New rice varieties

were created. Fruit cultivars began to widen genetic bases of local fruits. Clones were being used. More greens were introduced. Poultry was beginning to supply more fresh eggs and meat. This was all the beginning of the diversification of Brunei's economy, but the country is still relying too heavily on the production of crude oil. Translated to English, His Majesty once stated "a fistful of rice or a bundle of tapioca could sometimes be more precious than a handful of gold and million of dollars."(5, 3)

Solutions Under The Scope

The current food scarcity issues in Brunei have been addressed by the country's government. After quite the brainstorming session, two possibilities came to the forefront as best for the country. One of these solutions was to have a fruit and agriculture fair in order to boost agriculture production and the planting of trees. Another of the government's ideas was to appeal to foreign countries in hopes of investment opportunities. Perhaps by allowing foreign investors to spend their money on their country, the people of Brunei would have a better chance at becoming more food secure.

On July 10, 2008, The Fruit and Agri Food Fair of 2008 kicked off. The fair lasted until July 13th. The theme of the fair was "Buah Tempatan Warisan Negara: Cintai dan Hargai" or Local Fruits is the National Heritage: Love and Appreciate Them. The major aims were to increase Brunei's agriculture production and begin growing more trees. The Agriculture Department of Brunei wanted to further develop the agriculture and Agri-food sector of the country in order to increase food security. While the fair was going on the food output was estimated at being 34% (11) which is low. The Agriculture Department has a 5-year plan for 2008-2013 to increase production and quality of local fruits. Brunei would like to be producing 24,649 metric tons of fruits by 2023. In this year, the government of Brunei plans to give 17,000 seedlings to student, farmers, and the rest of the public to plant around their homes. Teachers will take courses to learn to plant the trees, and in return, will teach the students to plant them correctly. There are 68 schools that will be planting 5000 seedlings. The Agriculture Department will be distributing guidebooks to the Agriculture and Science studying students who will carryout the project. The types of trees given to the people to be planted are asam aur-aur, jackfruit, rose jackfruit (cempedak), mango, tampoi, pangalaban, tarap, kembayau, yellow durian, lobster orange durian, belunu, and membangun. Also included in the fair was a tree replanting activity, talk on health benefits of fruits, drawing and coloring competitions, and quizzes.

By turning itself into a business opportunity, Brunei hopes to peak the interests of foreign investors. The country hopes that by having tax incentives it will gain foreign investment in industrial activities. There are four categories of industrial activities: those related to national food security, those for local market, those based on local resources, and those for export market. The industrial activities dealing with national food security and local resources require local participation, but local market and export not having to do with national food security are allowed to be completely foreign owned. There are four stages of making a business in Brunei: approval of the concept, approval of firm proposal, approval of physical plans, and approval to operate. The Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources will be the contact for convenience.

Conclusion

The country has high hopes for both projects, but one question still stands about the country and its progress. Is Brunei on the right track to increasing food security? To find the answer to this question, countries that have similar interests and countries nearest Brunei must be analyzed.

When placed under the scope, countries with similar interests in the oil industry like Iran and Saudi Arabia have troubles with food insecurity as well. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have given up most of their time to the oil industry, leaving agriculture in the dust. These countries have been investing in foreign countries for food imports.

Iran is currently dealing with the problem by trying to reduce the amount of poverty in the country as well as other actions. Iran is using a program called Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Mapping System or FIVIMS. Not only is Iran trying to target the area of most food insecurity, but it is trying to target the causes so as to not let food insecurity happen again.

Just like Brunei, Saudi Arabia thought it was sitting well by providing the world with oil. Now, the time has come where oil prices are rising, but so are food prices. This spike in pricing has sent Saudi Arabia a message: Is the food supply stable? Saudi Arabia's fears are slowly being realized. Right now, it is fighting food insecurity by investing in other country's food supplies.

Some of the countries nearest Brunei like Cambodia and the Philippines are suffering from food insecurity as well although their reasons for the food insecurity may be different. Cambodia and the Philippines are trying to take back their country by taking back their food security. Both are in the process of projects similar to those of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Cambodia is using an atlas provided by the World Food Program which identifies provinces located within the country that are food insecure. The U.N. is also taking measures to help increase access to the land and diversification of Cambodia's economy.

The Philippines started using FIVIMS as well. FIVIMS allows the Philippines to find out what provinces are suffering from food insecurity and where poor families living with hunger are. There are also several other projects being used such as a project which allows low-income families to obtain quality rice and instant noodles for low prices.

Is the country on the right track? Will Brunei someday turn into a food secure country? Hopefully, yes. If all goes to plan, a long time from now, this will be just a speck on the radar of Brunei's agricultural history, and the people will be food secure by producing their own food. Someday these people may not remember how it feels to wonder where their food will come from.

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