

BRUNEI

GENERAL INFORMATION

Brunei is located on the island of Borneo and comprises an area of 5,765 square kilometres. The population of 220,000 is composed of Malays (40%), Chinese (30%) and indigenous tribes (29%). Languages spoken include Malay, English and Chinese dialects. A British protectorate from 1888, Brunei refrained to join the Malay federation in 1963 and became an independent Sultanate in 1964 at the expiration of a 140 year old treaty relationship with Britain.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Sultanate of Brunei is ruled by His Majesty Sultan Sir Muda Hassanal Bolkiah. The Sultan and his three brothers control all effective power. They are helped by a group of able and western educated technocrats. Traditional loyalty to the Royal Family and the Islamic faith provides cohesiveness within Brunei society. Although political parties are legal, only one has been formed and elections have not been held since 1962.

Brunei citizens enjoy one of the highest per capita GNP's in the world, estimated at about US \$23,000. Ninety-eight percent of Brunei's GNP derives from oil and gas exports. The government runs a \$2 billion surplus and reserves are in excess of US \$13 billion. Efforts are being made to diversify economic activity away from over-dependence on oil and gas. Other areas of interest such as agriculture, forestry and financial activities have been identified in Brunei's First Development Plan (1985-1990).

FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATIONS

Brunei has joined ASEAN, the Commonwealth, Organization of the Islamic Conference and the United Nations, as well as the Islamic Development Bank's long-term trade financing program. Brunei is not a member of OPEC but it holds observer status. ASEAN is the number one priority in its fledging foreign policy. Japan, Singapore, Britain, the USA and South Korea are its main trading partners.

CANADA-BRUNEI RELATIONS

Canada's bilateral relations with Brunei are mainly pursued through ASEAN and the Commonwealth, a situation which is likely to continue. Canadian banks have shown an interest in the country and there may be opportunities to capitalize on diversification of Brunei's management of its financial assets. It is worth noting that Prime Minister Trudeau paid the first official visit to Brunei by a foreign head of government in January 1983. The Sultan came to Canada in September 1987 to attend the Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting in Vancouver. 1988 marks a special date in Canada-Brunei relationship as Brunei will become, in July, Canada's dialogue co-ordinator with ASEAN. There are approximately one hundred Bruneian students in Canada.