

Papua New Guineans Attack Chinese Immigrants

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Thousands of rioters attack Chinese businesses, illegals across the country

Under the radar of virtually the entire world, a spasm of recent violence against Chinese residents and businesses in Papua New Guinea has caused at least six deaths and strained relations between the small island nation and Beijing, which is demanding that the Port Moresby government ensure the safety of its citizens and companies, according to dispatches from the country.

Although the tension appears to have abated somewhat, the incidents, which have emerged in reports from local media and scattered Australian press dispatches, paint a disquieting picture of racial violence at least partly attributable to a sudden, huge influx of Chinese illegal immigrants able to get visas, in the words of Prime Minister Michael Somare, for nothing more than a six-pack of beer from the thoroughly corrupt immigration department.

In response to China's request, Papua New Guinea's foreign affairs and immigration minister, Sam Abal, told the Australian Associated Press he had called on the Chinese government to help eradicate what he called "bad apples" breaking PNG's laws.

By some estimates, more than half the ethnic Chinese in the country are there illegally, moving wholesale into extractive industries and setting up small shops that have been driving local ones out of business with bottom-line prices. Abal, the immigration minister, said corruption, not just in immigration, is "paralyzing PNG's systems".

Papua New Guinea is tied with six other countries for 151st among 180 in the Transparency International corruption perceptions index. Its population of 6.1 million people is made up of Melanesian, Papuan, Negrito, Micronesian, Polynesian ethnic groups in several thousand separate communities, some of which have squabbled with each other for centuries.

"The advent of modern weapons and modern migrants into urban areas has greatly magnified the impact of this lawlessness," the CIA World Factbook said. They do not take kindly to strangers, especially undocumented ones. Port Moresby traditionally has been one of the most dangerous towns in the region for unwary foreigners.

"Local citizens are angry with people who don't have proper licenses, don't speak English and they are running the small shops, or doing activities the Papua New Guineans should be doing, which seems legitimate to me," Abal told AAP.

The police have used tear gas and live ammunition in an attempt to control looting, as thousands of men and boys stormed Chinese stores. Although the story has received considerable exposure in the Australian press, it has received relatively little coverage anywhere else.

According to local media on the Internet, the trouble began on May 10 when local ethnic PNG

workers clashed with management at the Chinese-run Ramu nickel mine in Madang Province on the northeast coast after a local worker was injured by a tractor. It spread from there.

"The trigger for the regrettable outbreaks of violence against Chinese in Papua New Guinea is the recent impact of an influx of workers, a number illegal, from China," Bob Tate, Executive Officer of the PNG Forest Industries Association, said in a press release.

Violence against Chinese traders first broke out in the capital, Port Moresby, spread to the city of Lae and then to several other provinces including Madang and Eastern Highlands, according to newspapers in the region.

Somare blamed police and immigration department corruption and inability to control the violence for the wave of Anti-Asian rioting and looting, saying Monday that he was "embarrassed" and "appalled" by "a handful of hooligans and rascals" who attacked Asian businesses.

"I am very disappointed by what has happened. Chinese citizens and businesses have been victimized by our criminals," he told reporters in Port Moresby on Monday. "We condemn the criminal actions against the Chinese."

Beyond that, the reports said, Chinese bosses in the extraction industries hire workers who speak Chinese and not English as required by immigration laws. There are also concerned that the Chinese had brought with them organized crime and corruption to an area that already is one of the most lawless in Asia.

"We know a lot of things are going on," Somare told reporters. *"We know some are saying you give me a six pack (of beer) and I'll give you a passport. It's intolerable. There must be work ethics amongst our civil service. Immigration, yes we blame immigration,"* he said.

Noel Anjo Kolae, a local activist in Port Moresby, was reported to have organized and led an anti-Chinese protest that ended in violence and looting, sparking similar attacks across the country, AAP reported.

"All of PNG is fed up. We are tired and frustrated," he told AAP. *"It's not opportunists protesting as the government says, it's police, public servants, soldiers and even church men. Asians in PNG are robbers, not investors."*

Although the violence now appears to be contained, a widely circulated email from an unknown source is calling for serious organized anti-Asian attacks.

"No more Asians owning Cottage Businesses in PNG by 31 December 2009," the email said, *"or otherwise, we will celebrate 2010 New Year with bonfires of all Asian-owned shops in flames all around the country. Forget the government. If they can't do it, we will do it ourselves,"* the email said.

P.S.

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