



INFRASTRUCTURE MAP LAUNCH

ALL THAT IS BLUE – THAT IS MY DREAM

Introductory Statement

Friends, colleagues, both here and joining online, Good morning all.

The Pacific Ocean has become, once again, a region marked by deep tension. Whether it be political, geopolitical, economic, or strategic, the tension is tangible, and it continues to escalate dangerously.

Why?

Perhaps this should not be so surprising given the Pacific Ocean's sheer size and scale. After all, oceans in general are widely regarded as humankind's final frontier on Earth. The accompanying prospects of 'unlimited', untapped resources and wealth, most of which should and must be made available 'for the benefit of mankind', is no secret.

Indeed, large multinational corporations backed by powerful governments and institutions repeatedly fuss about these matters in ongoing global debates such in the UN deliberations on biodiversity, biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and in the International Seabed Authority on seabed mining.

In the eyes of those looking into the Pacific, this region accounts for 1/3 of the earth's surface, and is occupied by about 28 percent of the global EEZs. A whopping 28%! And, on top of that, there's a whole 72% of it that remains 'fair game' for the taking.

Friends, doesn't this all sound familiar!?

Divisions of territories and peoples appeared when colonial powers entered the region. Planting flags on our islands, demarcating boundaries and imposing limits, cementing private ownership, and securing resources for their homelands. In this manner, the Pacific was colonized. The Pacific Ocean, its peoples, islands, seas plotted very clearly on THEIR MAPS; MAPS they used to project and exert geopolitical and geoeconomic power and control.

Today, a new form of colonialism is taking place. No longer is it only on land but pivoted to the ocean. It is based on the premise – ALL THAT IS BLUE – THAT IS MY DREAM. The rush by global powers to carve out zones in the Pacific Ocean once again displaying and demonstrating power, control and intentions for the Pacific ocean.

These points/zones suddenly tell a story about the rapid development funding of ocean re-sources and infrastructure funding. These funding options fall under frameworks that are used to control the choice of development partners such as the Pacific Step Up, Pacific Reset, the Maritime Silk Road and the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

These frameworks are developed without the people and Islands governments of the Pacific. Its developed through lenses of geopolitical powers in competition against each other yet all aiming for one thing: influence and control of the region. To influence and control means controlling politics and economics or natural resources development agendas.

PANG observed another development that was intriguing. The competition became infrastructure. Who was funding which port? Airport, shipping port, roads, bridges? And why was there so much scaling up of financing in a span of less than 10 years when the Pacific for the longest time always requested for development funding to improve infrastructure?

Don't get us wrong - Funding of development in the Pacific Islands is needed and indeed welcomed. But, its equally important to recognize the fact that such funding typically come with strings attached. Funding can, for instance, be used by development partners to force Pacific Island governments to choose sides in international relations. The debt from infrastructure funding also becomes a resource for donors, a resource to leverage against Pacific Island Countries if needed.

So, Port Infrastructure funding became a focal point. This includes building of ports, Rehabilitation of ports, and upgrading of ports.

Ports are important gateways for domestic and international movement of goods and services. Location of Ports are also critical for ease of freight, movement of raw materials in and out of the country. But Ports are also tied to security reasons.

What were the funding about? Political influence? Economic influence? Resource influence in terms of extraction?

Again, the Pacific Islands have a history of their minerals resourcing the needs of other countries but not the Pacific Islands. But why ports, specifically deep-water ports? To help answer these questions, PANG commissioned a research in 2021, led by the good Professor Naidu, to take a deep dive into murky waters for some answers.

The research looked at 4 case studies: Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Tonga and Cook Islands of the geopolitics of infrastructure.

These countries were chosen for the following reasons:

- * PNG- a country with abundant resources and the first country to issue commercial deep sea mining licenses
- * Vanuatu- where the geopolitics of infrastructure began with the Luganville wharf;
- * Tonga- a sponsoring DSM State
- * Cook Islands- another sponsoring DSM State but also a country rich with polymetallic nodules

Professor Naidu is here today to share in detail the findings of the research. Vinaka!

- Lice Cokanasiga

