

Lufa's growth road map endorsed



Left: Prime Minister James Marape and Eastern Highlands Governor Simon Sia receive the Lufa District Five-Year Development Plan 2023-2027 from three-year-old Thabbel Adolf.

Below: A view of the Lufa Station, established by missionaries in the 1930s.

Lufa is renowned as one of the major coffee-producing areas in Eastern Highlands and Papua New Guinea.

By MALUM NALU

ON the beautiful morning of Tuesday, June 20, 2023, as we make our way towards Lufa Station in Eastern Highlands for the launch of the Lufa District Five-Year Development Plan 2023-2027 by Prime Minister James Marape, a sense of nostalgia engulfs me.

Travelling to Lufa feels like returning to a place I've never really left.

My first visit to Lufa dates back to 1975, the year Papua New Guinea gained independence. I accompanied my father, who served as the primary school inspector for Eastern Highlands. I vividly remember the dusty but well-maintained roads, courtesy of the proactive Plant and Transport Branch (PTB) stationed along the Highlands Highway and Goroka-Lufa feeder roads.

Back then, a sedan could easily traverse the road from Goroka to Lufa, as it was diligently maintained. It was a time when road disruptions were unheard of.

In 1998, I had the privilege of joining then Agriculture Minister Tukape Masani on a trip to Lufa for the launch of the renowned Lufa Mushroom Project, which unfortunately faced challenges along the way but is now experiencing a revival through the Chinese Juncao Project based in Eastern Highlands.

During my tenure at the Coffee Industry Corporation from 1998 to 2002, while working in Goroka, I developed a deep appreciation for the significant role coffee

plays in Lufa, Eastern Highlands, and Papua New Guinea as a whole.

Situated at an impressive altitude of 1,500 meters (4,900 feet) above sea level, Lufa Station serves as the vibrant capital of Lufa district. It serves the three local level governments (LLGs) of Mt Michael, Yagaria and Unavi. This captivating destination offers a delightful fusion of history, nature, and culture.

Originally established as "Lufa Mission Station" by European missionaries in the late 1930s, it has transformed into a thriving hub known simply as "Lufa Station." It serves as a prominent trading centre for the surrounding area, hosting government offices, schools, and churches, embodying the essence of community life.

Nestled amidst breathtaking mountain ranges, Lufa Station entices adventurous souls and curious travelers alike. Exploring the remarkable Mt Michael, which stands tall at an impressive elevation of 3,647m (11,965ft), is an experience that leaves one spellbound.

Located in the Mt Michael Rural LLG, approximately 100km from the provincial capital of Goroka, this majestic peak offers captivating trekking opportunities. Standing atop the summit, one is greeted with panoramic views of the awe-inspiring landscape.

Named in honour of Australian explorer Michael Leahy, whose expeditions in the 1930s played a pivotal role in opening up the Eastern Highlands for

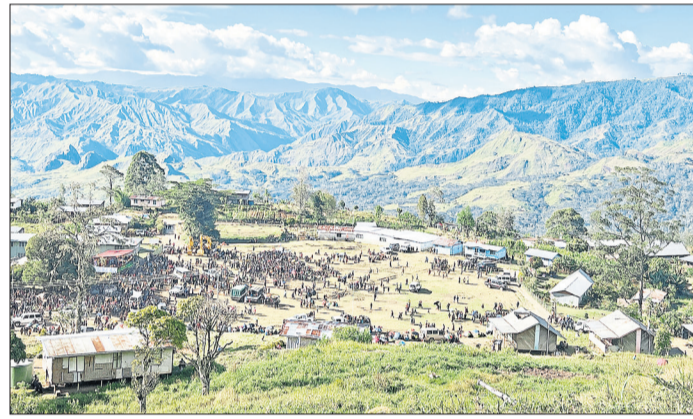
trade and settlement, Mt Michael is home to a diverse range of wildlife.

In an emotional moment, Prime Minister and Pangu Pati leader Marape receives the Lufa District Five-Year Development Plan 2023-2027. Symbolising the challenges faced by the people of Unavi in remote Lufa, a three-year-old child, Thabbel Adolf, emerges from a mud-covered truck and presents the plan to PM Marape amidst a gathering of thousands of people at the foothills of the iconic Mt Michael.

Lufa is renowned as one of the major coffee-producing areas in Eastern Highlands and Papua New Guinea. However, the lack of proper roads has always posed a significant hurdle in transporting coffee to the market. Crater Mountain in Unavi, famous for its coffee, relies on the efforts of local people to carry it to market or resort to air freight.

Accompanying the Prime Minister during this significant event are Eastern Highlands Governor Simon Sia, State Enterprises Minister and United Resources Party Leader William Duma, Goroka MP and Agriculture Minister Aiye Tambua, Finance and Planning Minister Rainbo Paita, Obura-Wonenara MP John Boito, Kainantu MP William Hagahuno, Unggai-Bena MP Kinoka Feo, Daulo MP Ekime Gorosahu, and host Lufa MP and Minister for Environment Conservation and Climate Change Simo Kilepa.

Witnessing the occasion are numerous individuals who have traveled on foot for two to three



days from the farthest corners of Lufa, which are yet to be reached by roads, bordering Chimbu, Gulf, and Southern Highlands.

The Prime Minister's heartfelt gesture of carrying the child in his arms and receiving the plan elicits tears from many onlookers. In his address, he assures the people that his government will address their road challenges, including the construction of a road from Lufa station to Unavi, connecting remote Karamui in Chimbu.

Furthermore, the Government aims to tackle the deteriorating road linking Lufa station to the main Highlands Highway.

Prime Minister Marape pledges K5 million to the Lufa District Development Authority (DDA) to initiate the plan and an additional K2 million for Flexible Open Distance Education (FODE). Minister Duma presents K2 million for the Lufa rural electrification programme.

"Our government will relieve the district and provincial governments of the responsibility of constructing the road from Lufa to Karamui, as part of our 'Connect PNG' programme," proclaims Prime Minister Marape, evoking cheers from the crowd.

"This road will serve as an alternative route on the southern side of our country, linking Lufa to Karamui in Chimbu, Kambia in Jiwaka, and Pangia in Southern Highlands.

"We will commence work once the Works and Highways Department provides accurate cost estimations.

"While this year's budget does not allocate funds for this purpose, it will certainly be included in next year's budget. The other roads to be included are Marawaka to Menyamy in Morobe, Okapa to Kimi, Hengano to Ramu in Madang, Upper Asaro to Gembogl in Chimbu, and of course, Lufa Station to

Unavi. "I extend my gratitude to the people of Unavi for their unwavering spirit despite the challenges posed by the lack of road access.

"I assure the people of Unavi and Lufa District as a whole that the responsibility of building this road rests upon us as the government.

"Your duty is to safeguard the area, maintain law and order, prioritise education and religious institutions, and expand coffee production."

In a nutshell, the Lufa plan has been developed by MP Kilepa in consultation with key stakeholders from the three LLGs, encompassing 32 wards. This plan will guide the Lufa DDA board in the equitable allocation of District Services Improvement Programme (DSIP) funds for prioritised projects, in consultation with the Eastern Highlands and National governments.

The plan includes support for key projects such as small to medium enterprises (SMEs), church-run health and education institutions, equitable participation in the proposed Crater Mountain Mining Project, coffee rehabilitation and expansion, revival of the dormant Lufa Mushroom Project, technical and vocational education training (TVET) and other educational opportunities, climate change and environmental conservation, village industries and agro-based SMEs, and essential infrastructure development, including roads, bridges, electricity, and telecommunications.

As we depart Lufa that afternoon, I cast a final glance towards Lufa Station and the cloud-covered peaks of Mt Michael, pondering what the future holds for this enchanting place in the next 50 years.

● Malum Nalu works for the Office of the Prime Minister



Below:

Part of the massive crowd at Lufa against the backdrop of the magnificent Mt Michael.