

Liberia independence day

After decades of war, a new Liberia begins to take shape

On July 26, the Republic of Liberia celebrates its Independence Day.

Liberia, which means “land of the free,” was founded by freed African-Americans and freed slaves from the United States in 1820. An initial group of 86 immigrants, who came to be called Americo-Liberians, first arrived in Liberia and established a settlement in Christopolis, now the capital Monrovia, which is named after James Monroe (1758-1831), the fifth president (1817-25) of the U.S.

Thousands of freed American slaves and free African-Americans arrived during the following years, leading to the formation of more settlements and culminating in the declaration of independence of the Republic of Liberia on July 26, 1847 — 18 years before the 1865 abolition of slavery in the U.S.

The country’s motto says “The love of liberty brought us here.”

Situated on the west coast of Africa, Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and the Atlantic Ocean, and covers a land area of some 111,370 sq. km. It has a population of almost 3.5 mil-

lion.

Liberia is blessed with a phosphorus-rich soil that supports the production of various crops — rice, plantain, taros, yams, bananas, pineapples, mangoes, cereals, pepper and cassava. Rubber, palmetto, coffee and cocoa are the main export crops.

Liberia — Africa’s oldest republic and the continent’s former “Grain Coast” — has a wealth of mineral and natural resources, however, a decades-long civil war and government mismanagement destroyed much of the country’s economy, especially the infrastructure in and around Monrovia.

Many businesses fled the country, taking capital and expertise with them, but with the conclusion of fighting and the installation of a democratically elected government in 2006, some have returned.

Richly endowed with water, mineral resources, forests and a climate favorable to agriculture, Liberia had been a producer and exporter of basic products — primarily raw timber and rubber. There is some local manufacturing, mainly foreign



Back to nature: Bomi (Blue) Lake lies near Tubmanburg in the Bomi Hills northwest of the Liberian capital Monrovia. Its 100-meter-deep waters spring from a huge pit dug by an iron ore mining company.

owned, but it is small in scope.

President Ellen Johnson-

Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained banker and administrator, has taken steps to reduce cor-

ruption, build support from international donors and encourage private investment.

Embargoes on timber and diamond exports have been lifted, opening new sources of revenue for the government.

The reconstruction of infrastructure and the raising of incomes in the ravaged economy will largely depend on generous financial and technical assistance from donor countries, and foreign investment in key sectors, such as infrastructure and power generation.

One promising source of economic and social development, including infrastructure, is the tourism sector, which before the years of conflict provided access to a hospitable and fascinating society, rich in cultural and artistic traditions that could rival any in Africa, and a natural environment famous for its diverse flora and fauna.

The resources and potential for all types of travel, from cultural tourism, heritage tourism and historical tourism to ecotourism and recreational tourism, are present but were sadly neglected during almost two decades of war.

A great deal of time, effort and investment will be need-

ed before facilities are in place that will attract visitors in sufficient numbers to contribute to the balance of

payments, boost employment and improve transport systems as the government hopes.

Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Liberia on the 162nd Anniversary of Their Independence Day



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