



FORTNIGHTLY SECURITY UPDATE (FSU)

Vanuatu

Vanuatu Police Force(VPF) on alert due to antisocial behaviour in Port Vila: Following community consultations about bad youth behaviour in Port Vila, VPF [initiated](#) Operation ‘Restore Community Confidence’, which will run until January. VPF will focus on combating drunk driving, underage drinking, curbing so-called ‘josses’ activities, monitoring nightclubs’ hours, and other problematic issues.

The operation has encountered an early hurdle, with a student [claiming](#) that police released an incorrect [statement](#) about her and alleging that on 27 September, she was hit by a Vanuatu Police Force officer. Separately, according to social media, a Tannese man died after an alleged altercation with another man from Erromango at a venue in Freswota last week.



The Tebakor student has disputed the police force’s claims that she was intoxicated.

Comment: A step up in VPF patrols should help address antisocial behaviour but success will be

hard to achieve without support from families and the wider population. Failing to punish drink driving, underage drinking and rule-breaking by bars and nightclubs can fuel wider societal problems and harm Vanuatu’s international reputation, with possible consequence for tourism and the economy.

Air Vanuatu emerges from administration: On 2 October, the court [approved](#) a plan to transfer Air Vanuatu’s shares to AV3 Ltd – a 100% government-owned entity – which effectively terminated the liquidation. As such, the control of Air Vanuatu will be handed back to management.

“Implementation of the Deed of Compromise maximises the return to creditors and presents an opportunity for Air Vanuatu business to continue, saving jobs and providing vital aviation services for Vanuatu,” [said](#) liquidator Morgan Kelly.

Comment: This court ruling ends months of uncertainty, and the significant reduction in creditor claims, along with the establishment of a new management structure, sets the stage for a more efficient and commercially viable operation. A functioning national airline supports tourism, and connectivity, and facilitates development.



Air Vanuatu's 737-800 jet aircraft, YJ-AV1

Digital Masterplan launched: The government has [launched](#) a Digital Transformation Masterplan aimed at modernising public services to meet citizens' needs in a digital age. Acting Prime Minister Koanapo said the plan marked a milestone in Vanuatu's efforts to become more connected, efficient, and inclusive.

Deputy Chief Information Officer Jack said the masterplan, which aligns with the 2023 [Lagatoi Declaration](#), would position Vanuatu as a leader in digital innovation and cybersecurity in the Pacific. And Australia's High Commissioner expressed readiness to continue supporting Vanuatu.



Acting Prime Minister Koanapo and stakeholders at the Masterplan launch, 26 September 2024

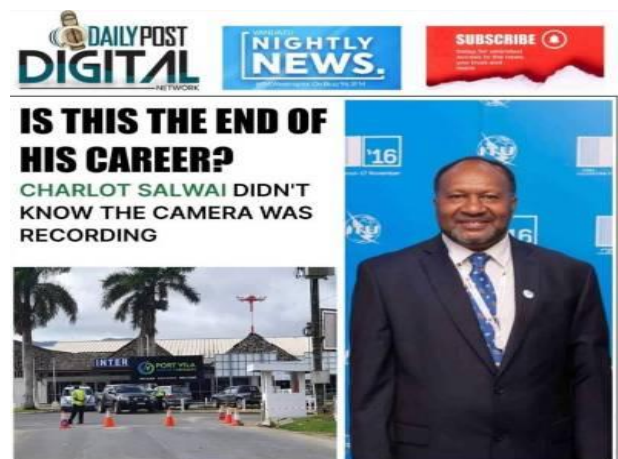
Comment: The launch of the masterplan is timely as cybersecurity threats grow. Pacific Islands Countries remain vulnerable to attacks, like the one Vanuatu [faced](#) in 2022. Digital inclusion is another critical issue, as people in remote or marginalised communities are often at risk of missing out on the benefits of digital change. Taking steps to improve digital literacy, infrastructure, and affordability, can help address social and economic inequalities.

Leveraging new technologies can also improve government efficiency, service delivery, and enhance key economic sectors like tourism and

agriculture. Successfully implementing the digital masterplan will require new investments in infrastructure and skills, as well as cooperation with partners.

Facebook scam uses Prime Minister's image: Vanuatu Facebook users were this week exposed to fraudulent 'clickbait' posts that implied that Prime Minister Salwai had either fallen ill or been involved in a scandal. The posts incorporated a *Vanuatu Daily Post* banner to make the fake news appear more realistic. Most Facebook users were quick to point out that the posts were untrue and shared warnings about the fake news to others.

Meanwhile, Meta, the parent company of Facebook has [launched](#) a new Fraud Intelligence Reciprocal Exchange (Fire) tool to work with banks in a bid to tackle scams. While the removal of pages through Fire is positive, it's small in the context of the 1.2 billion fake accounts Meta says it has removed over the past three months.



Facebook and Instagram parent company Meta has more work to do on reining in scammers.

Comment: Most actors who post fraudulent information go unpunished. Track down and punishing internet users who post fraudulent material is very hard for law enforcement. And social media companies struggle to manage the

proliferation of fake accounts and states are hard-pressed to maintain legislation that keeps pace with ever-evolving digital communication systems.

Facebook has faced growing pressure from politicians, regulators and businesses to tackle the spread of scams featuring deepfake images including celebrities and public figures, which have been used to promote investment scams.

As emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence make targeted ads easier, Vanuatu will face more sophisticated fraud attempts. So, public awareness of scam techniques and vigilant reporting by Facebook page administrators will become increasingly important.

United States offer help for weather forecasting:

The Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department (VMGD) has [received](#) a US\$1.655 million grant from the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) to assist with modernising weather forecasting and early warning systems. The project aims to improve disaster preparedness and resilience and dissemination of early warnings to the public.

Others have also offered help the VMGD in this area, including in 2022 when [funding](#) support was provided by the Green Climate Fund to strengthen and expand Vanuatu's climate and oceans observations networks.

Comment: *Strengthening weather forecasting and disaster preparedness is vital due to Vanuatu's high vulnerability to natural hazards like cyclones, tsunamis, flooding, and drought, especially as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.*



USTDA and VMGD officials meet.

Hundreds of households ordered to vacate

Eretap land: The Supreme Court's [order](#) on Eretap has raised concerns about displacement, community stability, and land rights. The eviction order stems from disputes over Leasehold Title No.12/0932/066, where customary landowners reportedly sold parcels of land without formal recognition, leaving various stakeholders vulnerable.

This land dispute and eviction promises to be another high-profile incident in Port Vila's history. A [similar major case in 2023](#), saw communities displaced from land around Korman Stadium, including residents who had lived there for decades

Comment: *Land disputes and evictions in urban areas like Port Vila highlight challenges around land ownership and customary rights. Many evictions stem from informal land agreements that leave all stakeholders vulnerable and undercut economic growth and social stability.*

Reforming legal frameworks around customary land ownership and lease agreements, along with timely enforcement of land issues could help avoid mass evictions. Greater transparency around land registration and more options for affordable housing might also help.

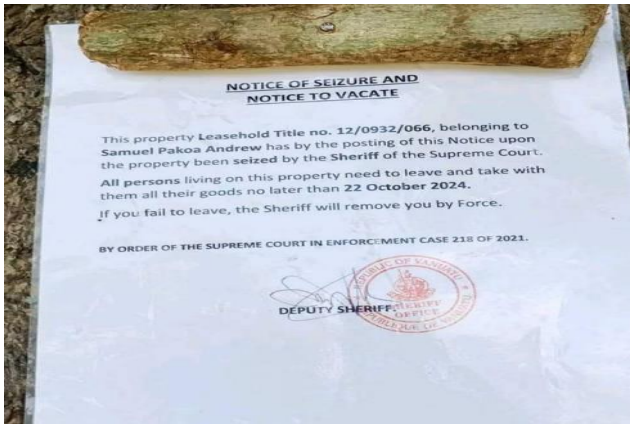


Image of eviction notice shared on [Facebook](#)

Regional

New Zealand navy vessel wrecked in Samoa:

Over the weekend, the HMNZS Manawanui sank after a fire broke out on board, causing the vessel to list and ultimately run aground near Upolu, Samoa. Fortunately, all seventy-five crew members and passengers were safely rescued with the assistance of Samoa's Fire and Emergency Services Authority, highlighting the effectiveness of their emergency response.

The incident raises several concerns regarding maritime safety protocols and the vessel's preparedness for emergencies. Investigations will likely focus on the cause of the fire, the crew's response, and the measures in place to prevent such occurrences in the future. The successful rescue operation underscores the importance of collaboration between local emergency services and naval forces in crisis situations.

Moving forward, it will be essential to analyze the circumstances surrounding the sinking to enhance safety measures and ensure the well-being of personnel on board naval vessels.

Comment: The sinking of the Manawanui is a loss for the region – it visited Vanuatu in June this year to assist with the rendering safe five World War II bombs in Port Vila Harbour. New Zealand Defence Minister Collins has said there was little chance of salvaging the ship, so the focus was now on mitigating any environmental impact. Fortunately, the vessel was diesel-electric so heavy fuel oils are not a concern.



HMNZS Manawanui ran aground and caught fire before capsizing off Samoa

China launches test missile into Pacific Ocean:

China's [firing](#) of an intercontinental ballistic missile ICBM, carrying a 'simulated warhead', into the Pacific last week has prompted some Pacific Islands forum members to [urge](#) Beijing not to ramp up military tensions across the region.

China didn't say where exactly the missile splashed down but French Polynesia President Brotherson [said](#) the missile hit near the Marquesas Islands, more than 12,000 kilometres from mainland China.

Comment: Beijing described the launch as "routine" and insisted it wasn't directed at any country. But analysts suggest the firing, which was China's first into the Pacific in more than 40 years, was likely intended as a warning to the US and others about China's nuclear capabilities.

Last October, Washington said China's nuclear arsenal had [grown](#) more quickly than anticipated and that it likely had more than 500 operational nuclear warheads, including 350 ICBMs. Weapons analysts speculated that the ICBM tested last week was a Dong Feng-41, which has a range of 12,000-15,000km.



Estimated flight path of China's 25 September ICBM launch. Source: Janes

Kiribati opposition talk of boycotting Presidential vote: Regional media suggests there are growing [calls](#) for a widespread boycott of the 25 October Presidential poll after the Tobwaan Kiribati Party (TKP) used its parliamentary numbers to block any opposition candidates from standing as presidential candidates.

Current President Taneti Maamau is running against two little-known candidates from his own TKP, while another TKP candidate, Riteta Iorome, recently left the contest. No reason behind her removal has been shared by election officials.

The opposition leader in the last parliament, Tessie Lambourne, claimed Kiribati was becoming a "one-party state" but a spokesperson from the President's Office said the Parliament's selection of presidential candidates is a democratic process that has been in place since before independence.

Comment: *The process appears to be legally sound but large sections of the population may be*

disgruntled over the lack of choice for President. Still, Maamau, who's been in power since 2016, is widely expected to win the vote and return as President for a third and final term.



Kiribati President Taneti Maamau

Paris scraps divisive New Caledonia electoral change as police raids continue in Noumea: French Prime Minister Michel Barnier [said](#) in his inaugural address to the national assembly this week that plans to "unfreeze" the electoral roll would not be sent to the joint meeting of parliament for ratification.

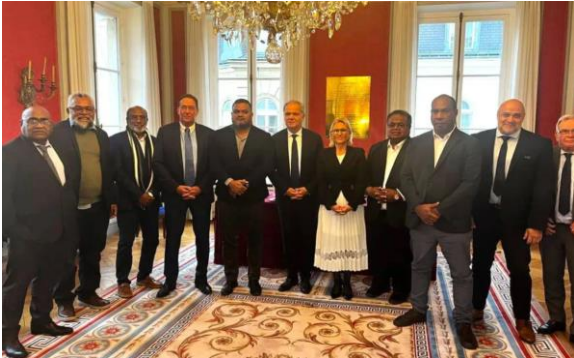
The original plan to open the electoral roll to tens of thousands of French immigrants was a major trigger for unrest that broke out in May, leading to 13 deaths and devastating New Caledonia's economy. "A new period must now begin, devoted to the economic and social reconstruction of New Caledonia," Barnier said.

Meanwhile, five individuals [wanted](#) by French authorities have surrendered in the pro-independence stronghold of Saint Louis, near Nouméa. The nearby road has been too dangerous for motorists since May.

Comment: *The decision by Paris to abandon its controversial plans to alter the electoral roll in a way that would have diluted Kanak political influence removes one of the obstacles to a peace in New Caledonia. But significant socio-economic disparities between ethnic groups and the need to rebuild that territory after almost six months of*

violence and economic damage will make the finding a path forward hard.

The Pacific Islands Forum endorsed the terms of reference for a high-level “Troika-plus” fact-finding mission at last month’s PIF Leaders’ meeting but it’s not yet clear when it will occur.

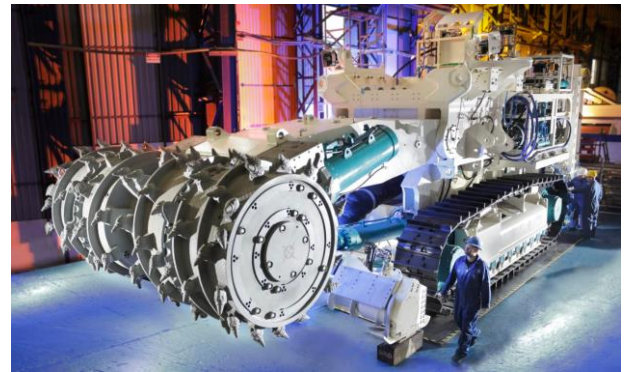


A bipartisan delegation of New Caledonia’s members of Congress in Paris on 30 September.

Diverse Pacific views on Seabed Mining seen at UNGA: While Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) President Heine [told](#) the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that RMI opposes any plans to mine the seabed, Nauru President Adeang [urged](#) countries to “accelerate efforts without delay” to get seabed mining going. Adeang focused on the economic opportunities of deep sea mining but also claimed that the minerals mined could be used in technologies used “to decarbonise our planet”.

But Heine argued the world needed to avoid stripping the seafloor’s unique diversity “before we even document it” and that better scientific understanding of the impacts and risks was necessary before turning the environment into “a speculative experiment.”

Though there was a lack of Pacific unity on seabed mining, the UNGA wrapped up with Pacific Islands leaders [reinforcing](#) a strong and common message on climate action.



A Nautilus minerals ‘bulk cutter’ robot intended to be used to chop up rock in mining operations.

Comment: Seabed mining is likely to remain a divisive issue in the region as governments prioritise different issues. Nauru, Kiribati, and the Cook Islands have regularly pushed for increased exploration and extraction of seabed minerals.

But the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Palau and Vanuatu have typically been strong voices against deep sea mining, and usually urge a precautionary – at least until the International Seabed Authority codifies mining practices and agrees on binding environmental measures.

International

United Kingdom returns Chagos Islands: The UK has [agreed](#) to hand over the islands to Mauritius, after 50 years of disputes. However, as part of the agreement, Mauritius has [guaranteed](#) that a US-UK joint military base could continue operating on the island of Diego Garcia for the next 99 years. The agreement will allow a right of return for Chagossians, but some are unhappy that sovereignty for the islands went to Mauritius.



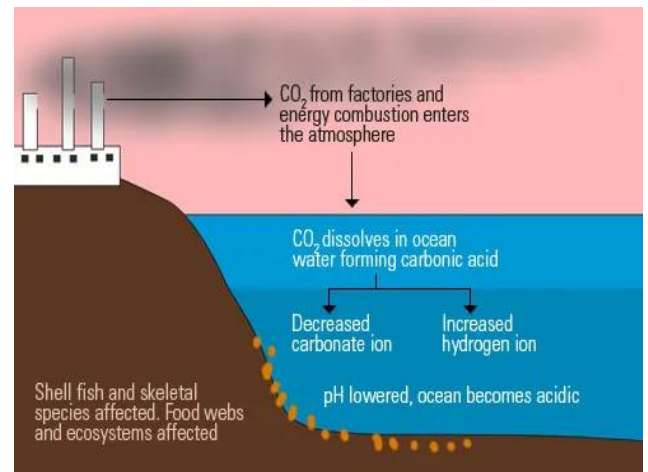
The Chagos Islands are in the middle of the Indian Ocean

Comment: The return of Britain's last African colony comes after years of criticism, an advisory opinion from the UN's highest court in 2019, a UN general assembly vote, and 13 rounds of negotiation over the last two years.

Coverage of the UK's handover may put French territories more in the spotlight but Paris will likely argue that the situations aren't the same and shouldn't be compared. And the arrival of a more conservative government in Paris suggests there'll be little interest in re-thinking French policy on Matthew and Hunter.

Report says oceans on verge of becoming too acidic to sustain life: The world's oceans are reaching dangerous acidification levels, threatening marine life and climate stability. A [report](#) by the Potsdam Institute warns that six out of nine factors crucial for regulating the planet's ability to sustain life have been breached due to human activity. A seventh factor, sustainable ocean acidification levels, are now also poised to be exceeded, largely because of ever-increasing emissions of carbon dioxide created by burning fossil fuels.

Rising ocean acidity [harms](#) coral reefs, marine food chains and causes marine biodiversity losses, which could translate into food shortages worldwide. It also hinders the ocean's ability to act as a carbon sink — when something absorbs more carbon than it emits — which could negatively impact efforts to slow global warming.



Outline of the ocean acidification process.

Comment: As a disaster-vulnerable island nation reliant on marine resources for food security and economic gains, Vanuatu faces severe social and financial and security consequences of this process. Scaling-up action at the local level, as well as advocacy at the international level will become increasingly important.

[Activities](#) like combating overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction can alleviate some of the effects of acidification. Strengthening ocean science, increasing the share of climate finance for ocean-based mitigation and adaptation strategies, and expanding marine protected areas could also help.

Israel strikes Lebanon, kills Hezbollah leader: Lebanese officials [said](#) more than 1,000 people have been killed by Israeli air strikes over the past two weeks. Hezbollah has responded by firing hundreds of rockets into northern Israel. The

Israeli military on 3 October [warned](#) people to evacuate communities in southern Lebanon, indicating that it may expand ground operations.

This follows an Israeli airstrike on Beirut on 27 September that [killed](#) Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Iran – a supporter of Hezbollah – has warned Israel that the assassination would not go unavenged. Iran-backed [Houthi rebels](#) in Yemen said they launched attacks against Israel too.

Comment: *Nasrallah was a dominant political and military figure for decades, linked to numerous deadly attacks against Israel. His assassination points to a spiralling, wider conflict in the Middle East, which can hurt Pacific Island countries by disrupting global economies, driving up fuel costs, and diverting global attention and resources.*



Israel is fighting on multiple fronts, exchanging air attacks across the region in recent weeks.