



FORTNIGHTLY SECURITY UPDATE (FSU)

Vanuatu

Barge ST11 returns to sea: The vessel departed after several attempts by authorities to remove it from Port Vila’s central business district. The issue saw the suspension of Director DEPC Mrs. Touasi Tiwok and concerns from the Ifira community and the public on the environmental pollution it brings.

While Barge ST11 has left, police investigations into Pierre Brunei Shipping’s alleged noncompliance with permit rules are ongoing. Authorities have stated that the company breached legal requirements set by the Foreshore Unit, as no permits were issued for its operations aside from a single permit obtained from the Environment Unit.



Barge ST 11 headed out at approximately 0730hrs, 27 November. Photo by NSCS staff.

Comment: Public sentiment toward the barge has been negative owing to concern that the vessel is an eyesore and has emitted pollution

during its prolonged stay. Port Vila’s population would likely be relieved now that the barge finally departed. Swift and effective collaboration between government departments and implementation of rules could help prevent similar issues from occurring again.

Immigration Department improves border processes, raises VT1 billion in revenue:

The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu has [made](#) significant strides in improving border security and immigration processes through the [launch](#) of the Migration Information Data Analysis System (MIDAS) and an integrated eVisa system in 17 of July 2024.

The system enhances security, efficiency, and the ability to detect and address threats like human trafficking and irregular migration. By incorporating biometric data, Interpol alerts, and streamlined visa applications, MIDAS enables faster processing and better-informed decisions, while building regional cooperation.

In addition, the introduction of an electronic passport system with advanced security features has further modernised Vanuatu’s immigration services. These innovations have [contributed](#) to the Department of Immigration and Passport Services reaching a VT1 billion revenue milestone in just five months. Plans are underway to expand these systems to Vanuatu’s overseas citizens, solidifying the



government's safeguarding of its borders and enhancing operational capabilities.

Comment: *The progress with MIDAS and the eVisa system is positive, but we must stay alert to other border security related issues like human trafficking, labor exploitation, and organised crime in the region persist.*

To reduce risks, the government can improve coordination between law enforcement, share data better, and keep track of travel patterns. It will also be important to make sure immigration staff have the latest training and tools to protect our borders and keep the people of Vanuatu safe from new threats.



Hardworking immigration team celebrates the revenue milestone. Photo: Vanuatu Daily Post

Department of Communication and Digital Transformation launched: The Director General of the Prime Minister's Office Cherol Ala [said](#) the newly-created DCDT will focus on improving internet access, promoting digital skills, and supporting vulnerable groups with the aim of improving Vanuatu's resilience.

The Department will work with public, private, and academic partners to drive innovation while ensuring data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical use of technology. The DCDT builds

on past work like opening telecommunications access and the work of the OGCIO. DG Ala urged all sectors to collaborate in creating a digitally inclusive and empowered Vanuatu.

Comment: *The DCDT can help Vanuatu bridge the "digital divide", address cybersecurity risks, and develop policies on the ethical use of technology, which can foster sustainable inclusive national growth and build resilience.*

To [succeed](#), efforts could focus on expanding affordable internet access, promoting digital literacy, and protecting against cyber threats. Collaboration with private and academic sectors will be vital, alongside clear policies for data privacy and digital governance. Fit-for-purpose legislation and a well-trained police force will also be crucial.



Launch of the Department of Communication and Digital Transformation.

Regional

Whooping cough confirmed in Samoa: The Ministry of Health in Apia [said](#) a seven-week-old baby boy, who had not yet received any vaccination, was confirmed to have whooping cough (also known as pertussis). The Ministry also said it has observed a high number of severe acute respiratory illnesses in hospitals noted

that other countries in the Pacific had also reported an increase in pertussis.

New Zealand this week [declared](#) an epidemic of the disease, with 263 cases of whooping cough recorded over the last few weeks – the highest number of cases in a month this year. A [resurgence](#) of pertussis started worldwide in 2023, after COVID protection measures relaxed, and continues now. Increased pertussis activity in the Pacific has also been observed in Australia, Hawaii, French Polynesia and New Caledonia.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), [whooping cough](#), is a highly contagious bacterial disease of the respiratory tract. It occurs mainly in young children and is easily transmitted. Pertussis can be prevented by immunization. The Western Pacific Region had 93% coverage with three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine in 2022.

Comment: *Timely vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of pertussis. But skepticism about vaccines among some communities and [underfunded](#) Pacific health systems have probably hindered protection measures.*

The WHO advises Pacific health professionals to: Increase pertussis immunisation coverage in their country/territory; Ensure children and pregnant women are up to date with pertussis immunisations, as per country schedules; and Enhance surveillance for pertussis.



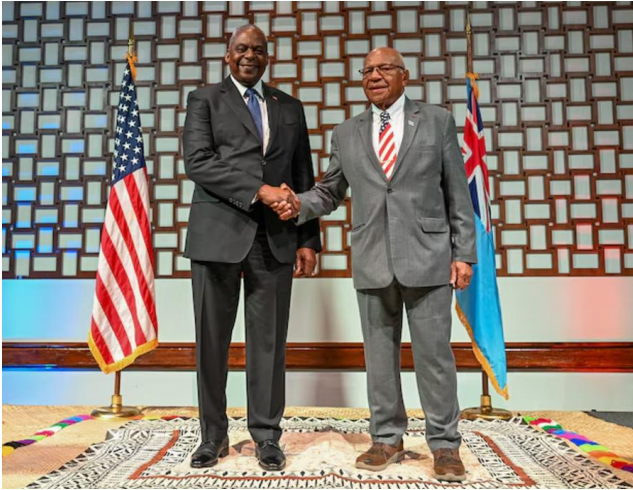
An illustration of Bacteria Bordetella pertussis which causes whooping cough.

United States and Fiji sign new defence pact:

The new defence agreement, [signed](#) during US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin's visit to Fiji last week, and reportedly in the works for ten years, will increase "bilateral logistical cooperation" and improve assistance during humanitarian emergencies and crisis response.

Austin [highlighted](#) the importance of the partnership and announced \$4.9 million to help modernise Fiji's military. The countries also began talks on a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) – a legal arrangement that sets out rules for engagements by military personnel. The new pact builds on existing collaboration, such as the [2018 Shiprider Agreement](#), maritime security initiatives, and National Guard Program.

Fiji Prime Minister Rabuka expressed appreciation for US support but also emphasised his desire for peace in the region. Some Pacific Civil Society groups cautioned against militarisation and called for more investment in areas associated with human development.



US Secretary of Defense Austin shakes hands with Fiji Prime Minister Rabuka in Fiji on 23 Nov.

Comment: *The new Pact part of the U.S. strategy to counter China's growing military power and influence in the region. U.S. leaders believe China wants to use its commercial and security ties across the Pacific to eventually establish a military presence. The deal with Fiji comes as the U.S. strengthens its links with other Pacific countries like Papua New Guinea, and as it improves military facilities in Micronesia.*

Militarisation and geopolitical tensions in the Pacific are a cause for concern for Vanuatu, which values peace and neutrality. Careful management of these changes may be needed to avoid getting caught up in global power struggles. Focusing on working with other Pacific nations on regional security, disaster relief, and climate change, rather than engaging in military expansion efforts, should help protect our interests and to maintain neutrality.

Solomon Minister linked to Chinese company:

An investigation [reveals](#) that just before the Solomons' elections this year, the current police Minister and the son of then-Prime Minister Sogavare set up an offshore shell company in Singapore with a Chinese business partner.

The company, "OUR International Development Fund Pte Ltd", has a name similar to the coalition formed by ex-Prime Minister Sogavare - OUR Party. According to registration papers, 40% of the company's shares belong to Sogavare's son, 40% to OUR Party President and current Police Minister Jimson Tanangada, and 20% are owned by a Chinese citizen, Pan Jinglin.

Tanangada admitted to the existence of the Singapore-registered company but claimed it had "no affiliation" with OUR Party. He declined to say what the company does or who Pan is.

Reporters couldn't contact Brandt Sogavare, who has been on a scholarship in China since 2019, but his father, Mannasseh Sogavare, said his son mustn't have known what he signed.

Sogavare denied that OUR Party wasn't involved in discussions to form the company but said, "Jimson (Tanangada) did mention setting up a company in Singapore" and that Tanangada, "said having the company in Singapore will ensure we have funds coming in to support Our Party-initiated projects." However, Sogavare said he told Tanangada that setting up a company "... in an international financial center like Singapore will raise a lot of red flags."

Opposition Leader Matthew Wale has said that he [believes](#) Tanangada hasn't told the truth about the purpose of the Singapore company. "Why would he put Sogavare's son as a shareholder? And why name the company 'OUR'?", he asked.

Comment: *Financial donations to political parties are common practice around the world but the use of shell companies and other secretive arrangements raise questions about transparency and foreign influence.*

OUR Party was relaunched by Sogavare after the 2019 election around the time that Honiara switched diplomatic recognition to China away from Taiwan. OUR Party ties to Beijing have strengthened, [including](#) in the security sector, which Tanangada has responsibility for.



OUR International Development Fund's listed address in Singapore.

Emmanuel Tjibaou to lead New Caledonia political party: Union Calédonienne (UC), one of the main and oldest components of the pro-independence movement in New Caledonia has [elected](#) Tjibaou as its new president. The election comes as UC's former leader, Daniel Goa, 71, announced last week that he was stepping down, partly for health reasons, after leading the party for the past 12 years.

Tjibaou's rise to the head of UC comes as New Caledonia's pro-independence movement is deeply divided. Last week, two of the main components of the FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front), the more moderate UPM (Progressist Union in Melanesia) and PALIKA (Kanak Liberation Party), reiterated that they would distance themselves from the FLNKS.

Comment: Tjibaou, 48, is seen as a new generation of political leadership in the Kanak independence movement. His father Jean-Marie

Tjibaou was well-known, leading figure of the 1970s, who pushed for political independence from France and co-founded the FLNKS in 1984, before being killed by an activist in 1989.

Emmanuel Tjibaou's election comes as New Caledonia faces significant post-unrest challenges including major reconstruction and financial distress. Political talks with Paris are expected in December with a goal of reaching a new political agreement by March 2025.



Emmanuel Tjibaou

Violence against women statistics higher in the Pacific: A report by UN Women [highlights](#) a prevalence of reported physical and/or sexual violence over the past year by intimate partners of 30% in Melanesia, 22% in Micronesia and 19% in Polynesia.

Other regions in the report included Southern Asia at 19 %, Western Asia with 13%, Central Asia 9%, South-Eastern Asia 9% and Eastern Asia 7%, and Australia and New Zealand 3%. Melanesia also had the highest reported lifetime prevalence of violence at 51% followed by Micronesia 41%, Polynesia 39%.

The UN report emphasised that gender equality is a fundamental human right, essential to achieve human dignity, peace and equality on a healthy planet. The report argued that

empowering women and girls spurs productivity and economic growth, sustains peace and supports inclusive development.

Meanwhile, local media [reported](#) this week that Vanuatu joined other countries around the world to support awareness and efforts aimed at eliminating violence against women. The Ministry of education in Vanuatu also affirmed its support towards this critical issue.



UN ESCAP and UN Women report cover

Comment: Violence against women is a pervasive problem worldwide, with Pacific Island Countries exhibiting some of the highest reported rates of intimate partner violence.

Such violence not only affects the immediate victims but also has broader social and economic impacts, including lost productivity, healthcare costs, and the perpetuation of gender inequality. Combatting gender-based violence requires action on various fronts, including strong legal frameworks and policing, education and awareness, support services, and leveraging community support and donor partnerships.

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meets in Suva: Ahead of the 21st

Regular [Session](#) of the Commission in Suva this week, the non-profit Pew Charitable Trusts international fisheries [project](#) advocated for further action on electronic vessel monitoring.

The NGO [hoped](#) to see amendments to improve conservation management measures for catch transshipment between eligible vessels on the high seas. The non-profit organisation also wanted increased electronic monitoring to be normalised for vessels fishing in Pacific waters.

Other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) around the world had tightened their fish transshipment rules to minimise the chance of illegal and unregulated activities. But the WCPFC is the last of the tuna RFMOs to lift its transshipping standard up to the guidelines established by the FAO years ago.



WCPFC logo.

Comment: Effective monitoring and policing of fishing activities in the South Pacific waters are critical for preserving marine ecosystems, ensuring the sustainability of fish stocks, and supporting the livelihoods of local communities that depend on fisheries.

Our waters home to some of the world's most valuable tuna fisheries, and these resources are under increasing pressure from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overfishing, and environmental degradation.

Conviction of Jacques Lalie: Jacques Lalie, President of the Loyalty Island Province since 2019, has been removed from the office following his conviction for favoritism in awarding a public contract. Sentenced to a one-year suspended prison term and two years of ineligibility, he loses all elective mandates, leaving the presidency vacant. Until a new president is elected within a month, the three vice-presidents—Robert Kapoeri, Julienne Lavelloi, and Omayra Naisseline—will manage the province's affairs. This marks the first time a provincial president has lost their seat due to a court ruling since the establishment of provincial governance in 1989.

justice · province of islands



The President of the Province of the Islands, Jacques Lalié, at Congress this Tuesday, November 26, 2024. · ©Gaël Detcheverry / NC The 1st

The President of the Province of the Loyalty Islands, Jacques Lalié, at Congress this Tuesday, November 26, 2024.

Comment: The conviction of Jacques Lalie, President of the Province of the Loyalty Islands, reflects challenges facing political stability in the Pacific region. The situation underscores the importance of robust anti-corruption measures to maintain trust and stability in Pacific Island governments, especially as regional politics often involve closely-knit communities and complex power dynamics.

International

COP 29 outcomes draw criticism: Though wealthy countries committed to spend more than US\$300 billion by 2035 to help poorer countries cope with the impacts of climate change, several have [criticised](#) the meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan for failing achieve enough.

India's negotiator calling the agreement an 'optical illusion', and other nations including Fiji and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) expressed strong objections to insufficient funding. Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General Waqa [said](#) on Thursday that PICs needed "substantial finance" and expected "... simplified funding that reflects our unique circumstances." Waqa also encouraged donors to contribute to the Pacific Resilience Facility, which would be operational in 2026.

Meanwhile, Fiji sugar minister and a millionaire businessman, Charan Jeet Singh, [described](#) most delegates attending COP29 as a "financial burden to their respective countries". Singh, who was at the meeting, wrote on social media that most of the attendees were "just wasting time" and said next year Fiji should send a "very lean team of professionals, experts and negotiators who are objective and can deliver their hard and clear message to COP 30". PNG had earlier decided to avoid the meeting altogether, with Foreign Minister Tkatchenko [describing](#) it as "a total waste of time".



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Samoa's Minister Toeolesulusulu Cedric Schuster, chair of the AOSIS group

Comment: While climate finance is an essential part of building our resilience to climate change, the amounts agreed at COP 29 are insufficient and much the method of financing risks debt distress. [Research](#) shows extreme weather is already costing vulnerable island nations US\$141 billion each year. And estimates suggest this will rise to [\\$1 trillion annually by 2030](#).

Vanuatu Special Envoy for Climate Change and Environment Ralph Regenvanu has made it clear that the commitments made in Baku were “not enough”. With the UNFCCC process failing again to meet developing countries’ needs, the importance of Vanuatu’s push for the case at the International Court of Justice takes on more importance as it would help impose legal obligations on States to act on climate change.

Israel and Lebanon’s Hezbollah begin ceasefire period: Israel’s cabinet [approved](#) the U.S.-brokered agreement on Tuesday, which will see a 60-day truce to facilitate the withdrawal of Israeli and Hezbollah forces from southern Lebanon, and the deployment of the Lebanese Army to the border area within two months, thereby creating a buffer zone south of the Litani River. President Biden [said](#) Hezbollah's

infrastructure in southern Lebanon would not be allowed to be rebuilt.

This move to restore peace and stability has made use of the 18-year-old United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which [defined](#) the “blue line” as a de facto border. The resolution stipulated, at the end of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, that the only armed groups in the area south of Lebanon’s Litani River should be the Lebanese army and UN peacekeeping forces (UN Interim Force in Lebanon – UNIFIL).



Map of United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Graphic by CNN

Comment: The U.S.-backed deal highlights international interest in regional stability, points to reduced conflict and increased flows of humanitarian aid to affected areas.

Specifics of the deal are yet to be released, and there’s no sign yet of a similar deal being struck between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Peace in the Middle East would benefit Vanuatu because it would help reduce volatility in oil prices and reduce supply chain issues and lower costs.

Arrest warrant issued for Netanyahu: The International Criminal Court (ICC) has [issued](#) arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu, former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif, accusing them of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Netanyahu and Gallant are charged with depriving Gaza's civilian population of essential resources like food, water, and medicine, contributing to a severe humanitarian crisis. Deif is accused of crimes including murder, hostage-taking, and sexual violence, though reports suggest he may have been killed in an airstrike.

United States President Biden [labelled](#) the ICC's pursuit of Mr Netanyahu as "outrageous". But unlike Biden, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said Australia respected the court's independence and role in upholding international law. "We have been clear that all parties to the conflict must comply with international humanitarian law," Senator Wong said on social media platform X. Wong's statement is at least the fifth time Australia has put itself at odds with the US on the Middle East.

The United Kingdom has also [indicated](#) that Netanyahu faces arrest if he travels to the UK. A spokesman from the prime minister's office refused to comment on the specific case but said the government would fulfil its "legal obligations". The ICC's member countries, including the UK, have signed a treaty that obliges them to act on arrest warrants.

Comment: For Vanuatu, which maintains diplomatic relations with Israel, this development could require delicate diplomacy. While Vanuatu strongly supports international law and human rights, it must carefully navigate its response to avoid straining its relationship with Israel. This situation could influence

Vanuatu's foreign policy decisions and its ability to advocate for global justice while maintaining its international partnerships.



Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and then-Defence Minister Gallant at a press conference in Tel Aviv, Israel, in October.