

Pacific Buzz (October 28): Commonwealth heads of government meet | Leasing islands to China | Regional security | Violence in West Papua



by Development Policy Centre

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A round up of current development policy issues in the Pacific, by the [Pacific Institute of Public Policy](#) and the [Development Policy Centre](#).

CHOGM 2011: Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience

Queen Elizabeth II will officially open the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting ([CHOGM 2011](#)) in Perth this Friday. The agenda (under the broad theme Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience) includes important issues for the Pacific – [climate change](#), food security and the continued global economic turmoil.

Attending the meeting will be delegations from eight Pacific island countries (Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu – Fiji was suspended from the Commonwealth in 2009).

Solomon Islands Foreign Minister Peter Shanel [told Radio Australia](#) that the question of Fiji's participation in Commonwealth gatherings would likely be one of the issues raised, reiterating his government's policy of engaging with Fiji.

The gathering of Commonwealth leaders presents an opportunity for the participating Pacific island countries to strengthen their diplomatic efforts ahead of the upcoming international forums, including the [G20 summit in France](#), the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (COP17) in South Africa and next year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil.

CHOGM is not only a chance for the leaders to meet the Queen — they are **expected to vote** on succession changes, which would give girls the same right to the throne as boys. For the changes to go ahead, the agreement of the 15 nations that have the Queen as their head of state **would be required** – in the region, this includes Australia, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, PNG and Tuvalu.

CNMI to lease uninhabited islands to China

After the collapse of their garment industry, the cash-strapped Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is to **lease land to China** on the condition that it is not to be used for military purposes.

CNMI is a US territory and currently leases most of the island of Tinian to the US military. Tinian was the staging area for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II. There have been protracted discussions about **expanding the military's use and development of the island** in association with the delayed military buildup in neighbouring Guam.

The recent US-China Governors Forum in Beijing saw CNMI Governor Benigno Fitial making the offer to **attract more Chinese tourism and manufacturing**. The announcement is likely to raise eyebrows in Washington.

US to remain 'a force for peace and prosperity' while PNG revisits police support from Australia

Despite the rising influence and presence of China in the Pacific, and the expected cuts of around US\$450 billion to the Pentagon budget, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has asserted **that the US will remain a military power in the Pacific**.

In other security issues, Papua New Guinea's prime minister, Peter O'Neill, has sought to resurrect the controversial **Enhanced Cooperation Program** in a move that would see increased Australian Federal Police support to PNG. While any move to tackle the pressing **law and order issues** is likely to win broad support, many are waiting details to see how the plan differs from the failed program of six years ago.

The Australian police may play a new role in PNG to **improve police performance** but at the moment all the two governments have agreed to is a short review into **policing needs** to be completed at the end of the year.

Still in PNG, the tragic plane crash that took the lives of 28 people last week is

under investigation as attention turns to [pilot training](#). The crash scuppered plans to [merge](#) the nation's two airlines.

Deaths in West Papua as violence breaks out

Violence escalated in Jayapura last week after Indonesian [security forces opened fire during a rally that resulted in the shooting of a police chief](#). Six deaths have been reported with unconfirmed numbers of casualties.

The incident has drawn much attention both in the region and internationally with [leaders being called to do more to protect the Papuan people](#). Although there are competing accounts of what exactly happened on the day of the incident, [six people are facing treason chargers over the Papuan congress](#). Indonesia is now [sending troops into Central Papua to maintain security](#).

However, West Papuan activists are strengthening their claims against Indonesia after the discovery of [bodies at the West Papua barracks](#). There are other unverified claims, but the [incident is to be investigated](#).

Vanuatu's membership to the WTO

After 16 years of negotiations, what is arguably the most polarized debate in Vanuatu reached a milestone as the [WTO General Council approved Vanuatu's membership](#) to become its 154th member.

The Pacific Institute of Public Policy undertook its own analysis of the deal that Vanuatu received as it prepares to [join the world's economic parliament](#).

However, while this may be a historical date for Vanuatu, the [Say No group are considering new plans](#), adamant that the WTO membership was rushed. There are still mixed feelings about Vanuatu's accession. According to the Vanuatu Daily Post, the trade minister says WTO membership 'is a good thing' despite the Vanuatu Christian Council being 'disappointed with the government's decision.'

In brief:

- President Anote Tong has raised concerns over foreign [influence in Kiribati elections](#).
- [E-welfare payments](#) have begun in Fiji.
- Should the [chambered nautilus](#) be a protected species?
- Tonga's capital Nuku'alofa is set for a [\\$14.5 million urban development project](#).
- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has officially

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opened its **new Pacific regional office in Port Moresby.**

- Australian unions have called for **sanctions on Fiji.**
- PNG, Samoa and Solomons resist the push to **decriminalise homosexuality.**
- With so many of the good players in the Rugby World Cup originating from the Pacific, we should consider **investing in sport for development programmes.**

*This roundup of development policy issues in the Pacific is a joint venture by the **Pacific Institute of Public Policy** and the **Development Policy Centre**. Editorial content is the responsibility of Derek Brien, PiPP executive director, and Stephen Howes, Devpolicy director.*

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