

# 2018 - THE YEAR IN REVIEW

## A look back at the top stories of the year

By Jason Abel

### January

Civil servants raised concerns over the government remuneration tribunal decision of upholding its employee's benefits to align the new salary scale within the VAT. The move was reinstated in June with employee's income including child and housing allowances packages.

The Vanuatu tourism partnered with Air Vanuatu in producing competitive fares into Australia and New Zealand in promoting Vanuatu as a tourist destination. The agenda was to increase tourist visits from both locations into the country as a must place to visit in the region.

The Office of the Maritime Regulator ordered 36 vessels to undergo slipping services in promoting safety regulations. The turnout has seen the majority going through services with few scheduled for early next year.

### February

Allegations arose that the National Disaster Management Office was distributing goods that had expired before being distributed. Opposition Leader Ishmael Kalsakau commented that the Pam recovery has lost its aura and called on the police to investigate the matter.

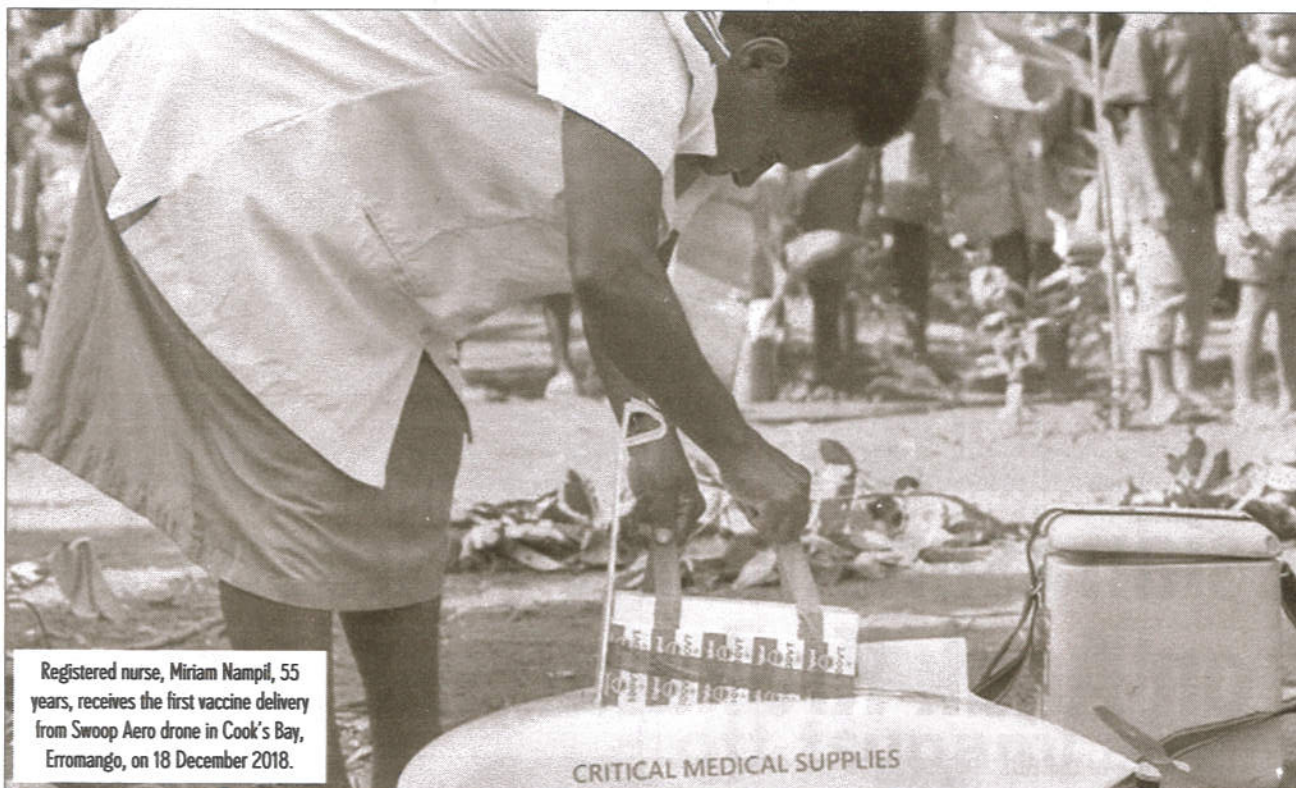
Former Deputy PM, Joe Natuman pleaded guilty to two counts of obstructing the execution of a criminal case. His seat was ruled vacated by the Speaker, and the decision was upheld on appeal.

### March

Former chairman of the Police Commission Sam Dan Avock was ruled to have been terminated without reason. The court awarded Mr Avock VT 3 million.

Her Majesty, the Queen of England, awarded the Director of the women's centre, Merelyn Tahu with the Commonwealth point of light award for 30 years of service in advocating women's rights and gender-based violence.

Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), Derick Alexander has called on teachers frustrated at ongoing salary anomalies not to put students at risk of failing. He appealed to teachers to be committed in educating



Registered nurse, Miriam Nampil, 55 years, receives the first vaccine delivery from Swoop Aero drone in Cook's Bay, Erromango, on 18 December 2018.

students until the Government Remuneration Tribunal (GRT) Board completes the review on their salary scales.

### April

For the second consecutive year, Vanuatu was rated the country most at risk from natural disasters in the World Risk Index report, which is prepared annually by an alliance of German development NGOs.

The bereaved parents of Florence Iaruel, the six-year-old girl who was allegedly abducted, raped and murdered at Etas, called for justice for the senseless murder of their daughter. The killer, who ultimately plead guilty, was later identified as a parolee who had committed violent crimes in the past.

The government announced that they had begun several court proceedings involving former AFIC Director Barnabas Tabi. "We can advise at this time that various legal actions are underway involving this person and further that a number of the irregularities uncovered have been reported to the appropriate authorities." Very little information has been released since then. Tens of thousands of depositors are still waiting for answers.

Prince Charles visited for a day. He was given the chiefly title of Mal Menaringmanu in a kastom ceremony that culminated in a dance performed by hundreds.

### May

Internal Affairs Minister Andrew Napuat enforced a VT500,000 spot fine for drivers under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

The Court of Appeal overturned Ronald Vudui's guilty verdict in the death of Robson Maraki. Mr Maraki was chased down by Vudui and others after he assaulted his girlfriend outside their workplace. He died after being delivered by police to Vila Central Hospital.

### June

The volcanic activity on Ambae led to a second eviction order from the island by the government. A state of emergency was placed for three months. It was lifted in November, but following advice from disaster officials, few Ambaeans returned immediately.

The Government has spent over VT619 million to reinstate the Housing and Child allowances of over 7,000 public servants.

Vanuatu Football Federation launched the ground-breaking ceremony for a new stadium at Freshwota field in Port Vila. President Lambert Maltok said that it had been a long process, given the new procedures with the current FIFA President, Infantino, who has been tightening up the financial issues concerning FIFA.

### July

The Electoral office has

announced the by election date for the Tanna Constituency. Leaders Party candidate, Jimmy Nipo has won the seat and was declared the 52nd MP of Parliament after swearing in Parliament, earlier this month.

A nationwide plastic ban became effective on the 1st of July, 2018 but single-use plastics remained around the city, as reflected in the 2% of banned plastics discovered. Authorities expected uptake to improve over time.

In his Independence Day address, President Obed Tallis made special mention of the people of Ambae who are affected by the volcanic activities and has shared his sympathy over the tragic incident.

### August

The National Green Energy Fund (NGEF) has finally been launched as an independent public entity to start sourcing funds for the Vanuatu Government and meet its energy targets. The government is targeting 100% electrification of the whole country by 2030 and 100% renewable energy.

Toktok Vanuatu 2018 returned, a marquee event on the tourism calendar. The event unites buyers and sellers of tourism products in lightning round discussions, opening the door to new opportunities, and allowing tourism businesses a unique opportunity to meet face to face with the people

who facilitate travel to Vanuatu.

### September

Asphalting work finally got underway in the Port Vila Urban Development project. Drivers were warned to be cautious when driving after few accidents have already occurred within the first two weeks of the newly asphalt work.

The Public Service followed up unpaid taxes owed to the government by business houses and other government institutions. It has appealed for effective cooperation amongst debtors in avoiding court disputes.

### October

Air Vanuatu considered adding the Brazilian Embraer E-190 to its current fleet.

A first ever Kava Forum was held in Port Vila with Government representatives, kava stakeholders, farmers and the public discussing a new sight of development into one of the countries key export commodities. The government has set the vision for Vanuatu to be the leading kava producer of quality organic kava not only in the Pacific but to the whole world as well.

Director of the Department of Correctional Services, Johnny Marango called on to the public to stop disseminating false information on social media especially concerning inmates. He had consider imposing tougher regulations on the use of social media after

a misleading post claiming six high risk detainees had escaped.

### November

The Salwai coalition government experienced its first major shake-up after two of his most active ministers were sacked by Acting PM Bob Loughman. The MPs claimed they were sacked without reason. The move led the Leaders Party to cross the floor to the Opposition bloc.

### December

Ambrym communities faced the eruption of its volcano once again after many years of a much peaceful environment. Status are not too good and the government through the National Disasters Management Office has been mandated to carry out the disaster operations.

The Government defeated consecutive motions of no confidence lodged by the Opposition against PM Salwai.

Parliament unanimously endorsed rule changes that will now require MPs who wish to sign a motion of no confidence to do so all at once, in the Speaker's office, in the presence of the Speaker. This reduces the likelihood of frivolous motions while at the same time increasing the likely success of a motion that succeeds in being tabled for debate.

Vanuatu launched its first ever drone vaccination program this month. The Launch has seen a baby in Cooks bay, Erromango, being the first recipient of the vaccine program. The Program is in line with the Health Ministry's vision to cut down transportation costs of health workers to remote areas, and having means to cater up and deliver effective services for remote communities.

Charlot Salwai introduced legislation to regulate political parties, affiliation of independent members of Parliament to political parties and other related issues allowing time for MP's to fully aware of the bill before it is passed by the Parliament. The Opposition Leader has applauded the move to avoid crossings of floors by MPs in parliament. These bills and most others never made it off the order table.