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## Koror offers sites for new hospital, no response

### Ngchesar selects Doktok governor, Watanabe floor leader



9 Newly elected members Ngchesar State Council. (Inset top photos) Left: New Governor Doktok / Right: New FL Watanabe.

It took two days of voting to select the governor of Ngchesar State by the unified 17-member government council composed of 8 traditional chiefs and 9 elected members on January 6th and 7th installation session. In the first balloting after swearing-in on the January 6th installation session day, the votes were 8 for PVA board chairman and longtime councilman, Jackson Dokdock, and 4 for Silvester Eililai Ngirke-

lau, political novice and son of retiring longtime member of council, Marchello Ngirkelau, and one of the six young out of the nine elected members to the council. The election was reset for the second day, Wednesday in which the vote was 12 unanimous for Doktok according to council sources. The vote for Floor Leader was held in which former member and staff veteran of

### Angaur governor Misech recalled

By constitution, second highest vote getter and defeated governor Sali shall take over until new governor is elected



Misech

Angaur not only requires its governors to serve a two-year term but also allows their removal if the people become dissatisfied within half that time. That is what happened to Gov. Natus Misech, who was recalled



Sali

the state government in the interim period between the recall and the inauguration of the next governor. According to PEC, a special election must be held within 30 days after the recall.

Koror State Government through a resolution by its legislature and a leadership letter in 2024, had offered several sites for new hospital that the Whipps Administration has been talking about for years and announced recently that the \$millions for the asylum seekers will be applied to the project. Despite the offer of several sites within Koror State, there has been no response from the President for over a year now while rumors are continuing about relocating the new hospital to Airai or Ngatpang which are considered to be the home states of the President and his father.

Koror State through Koror State Legislature Resolution No. 12-33, LD1 adopted on April 23, 2024 is "Requesting the Pa-

lau National Government to relocate the Belau National Hospital to another suitable site in Koror State". Four months later, a 5-page letter dated October 7, 2024 after the adoption of resolution was signed by lbedul Alexander Merep, Governor Eyos Rudimch, and Speaker Uchel Sechewas, and sent to President Whipps. But since then there has been no response according to Gov. Eyos Rudimch who said Koror State spent a lot of time and efforts in developing their well justified and prepare response.

The resolution which specifically calls for dialogue between Koror and the national government, went on to identify the sites including the current Koror Capitol in Ngerbeched

which was the sites of the hospital during Japanese period and early American administration, the Nippon Baseball Field to be exchanged with present hospital site in Meyuns, Ngeriieb in Ngermid, and several submerged lands around Koror through reclamation.

The letter attached petitions signed by hundreds of Koror residents pleading and appealing to the national leadership to relocate the hospital to another site in Koror to assure medical services and treatment closer to most people. The letter cited the meeting held with the Relocation Committee and its request for Koror to be in-

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### Palau to receive up to ten TCN's for initial group

By Elilai Rengil  
Palau is set to receive an initial group of about ten third-country nationals (TCNs) from the United States (US) within 30 days of receiving a \$7.5 million grant, under an agreement that allows for a total of 75 TCNs. The deal has drawn mixed reactions from traditional and elected leaders.



President Surangel Whipps Jr.

TCNs are individuals in the US who have lived there for an extended period of time and are not US citizens. A

"third-country removal" usually happens only after a person

### Legal options to deter the transfer of asylum-seekers to Palau

This document outlines lawful mechanism under Palau law and United States law that could deter, pause, or block the transfer of asylum-seekers to the Republic of Palau. The focus is on constitutional authority, statutory compliance, and administrative legality.

### CALL FOR A NATIONAL REFERENDUM ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES

Dear Leaders of the Republic of Palau, Members of the Olbil Era Kelulau, and Fellow Citizens, I write with deep respect for our nation, our leaders, and the democratic values that define the Republic of Palau.

I. PALAU LAW  
1. Constitutional Authority  
Palau's Constitutional Authority protects national sovereignty and legislative control over immigration. Any agreement that materially affects population or residency requires approval

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### Inside Stories

Senate proposes shift in elite visa law, opening door for foreign developers

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New law eases financial barriers for Palauan construction companies

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After Sanctions Concerns, Palau Changes Management of Its Registry

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cluded in the committee. The letter added other sites with maps to show their locations including surround lots surrounding the baseball field, Matulout in Medalaai, CIP office eastward toward M-Dock, Ngermid hilltop to include 3 additional lots, and current hospital site in Meyuns.

The resolution further states that present hospital "is aging structure and at the same time, its current site in Meyuns has been determined to be unsafe to continue to keep and maintain as the public hospital thereon." The resolution continues that "Koror remains the most populous and centrally situated state of Palau... and "provides the best access to and from the southern states of Palau with the majority of the infrastructure that is essential to support a hospital facility." The legislation was adopted by the Koror legislature which represents the residents of Koror who constitute the majority of over 80% of the Palau population.

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**Palau to receive...***from Page 1*

has received a formal deportation order from the US.

In practice, the term is sometimes also used for people who are expelled without a formal deportation process, often with no chance to seek asylum or other protection, and then sent to a third country, in this case Palau.

President Surangel Whipps Jr. announced during last week's press conference that the working group will be screening the list of potential deportees to Palau and that the country will be receiving them in small groups, with the first group consisting of around ten TCNs.

Following the receipt of the \$7.5 million grant from the US to prepare the TCNs accommodations at Palau Community College (PCC), the group will be arriving within 30 days.

President Whipps Jr. emphasized that the money received is not for the TCNs, but for the country's infrastructure and capacity needs. A portion of the funds will be used to support the TCNs until they gain employment.

In addition to the \$7.5 million, Palau received \$26 million from the US for pension reform, \$2 million towards supporting law enforcement initiatives, and continued assistance with studies leading to the building of a new national hospital.

**Legal options...***from Page 1*

2. Immigration and Residency Law  
Palau maintains restrictive immigration statutes. There is no existing legal immigration category for third-country asylum transferees. Work permits, residency, and long-term stay require statutory authorization.  
3. Environmental and Infrastructure Protections  
Palau law requires consideration of environmental and social impacts for actions affecting land, housing, water, and public services.

**II. UNITED STATES LAW**

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Palau and the US regarding the transfer of the TCNs was signed on December 24, by Minister of State Gustav Aitaro and US Ambassador Joel Ehrendreich, and is set to operate for one year with the option to renew.

The MoU was transmitted in a letter from President Whipps Jr. to the President of the Senate Hokkons Baules on December 31, in which President Whipps Jr. emphasized that the TCNs will have no criminal history and will be "among the most heavily vetted non-citizens ever considered for entry into Palau."

Despite the formalization of the agreement, public reaction continues to be divided. The signing drew public criticism as it took place on Christmas Eve without prior notice.

Additionally, letters from the Council of Chiefs and the Senate of the 12th Olbil er a Kelulau (OEK) sent to the President in both July and October of last year rejected the US proposal to host TCNs.

President Whipps Jr. addressed the opposition to the agreement, explaining that while some chiefs and senators have voiced objections, there are those in leadership that support it, including the House of Delegates, the Governors Association, the Speakers Association, and the Mechesil Belau. The

4. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)

Under U.S. law, asylum-seekers may only be transferred to countries that are safe, willing, and legally capable of providing protection. Palau is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks a formal asylum adjudication framework.

5. Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

If implemented without proper rulemaking or individualized determinations, the policy may be challenged under the APA.

6. Compact of Free Association (COFA)

**Ngchesar selects...***from Page 1*

the OEK and Koror State Legislature, Feliciano Watanabe, received 8 to 4 for Hashinta Tabelual, former court staff and teacher who is one of the three women elected breaking the glass ceiling on more women representation in the state government.

The selection for committee members and organization of the new government was deferred to another day reported one of the new members. Being a mix of legislative, executive, and traditional system, Ngchesar State and once the council makes a decision, it's final and the governor only certifies and implements policies, laws, and operational programs that the council makes.

President also noted that Chief Ngirturong John Sugiyama was present during the MoU signing.

Moreover, the President explained that the working group will prioritize TCNs from nations with which Palau maintains diplomatic relations, adding that if any TCNs arriving in Palau wish to be repatriated, the working group will ensure that their home countries are safe before facilitating their return.

The working group, chaired by Minister of Justice Jennifer Olegeril and MHRCTD Minister Ngrai Tmetulch, will select individuals based on skills needed in the local workforce and admit them under valid visas or work permits.

The President emphasized that the TCNs "are not stuck here" and may choose to leave at any time.

As Palau prepares to receive the first group of TCNs under the MoU with the US, the government continues to face mixed public reaction.

President Whipps Jr. reiterated that the arrangement aims to strengthen Palau's relationship with the US while addressing local capacity and infrastructure needs.

The coming weeks are expected to test both the logistical readiness of the working group and the public's confidence in the government's handling of the TCN transfer.

COFA governs defense, aid, and strategic access. It does not authorize population transfer or override Palau's immigration law.

**III. PRACTICAL LEGAL DETERRENCE STRATEGY**

Lawful deterrents include legislative refusal, constitutional litigation, immigration non-compliance notice, U.S. litigation risk, and human-rights monitoring.

**IV. LEGAL FRAMING**

This approach does not oppose refugees. It asserts that Palau currently lacks the legal framework, capacity, and constitutional authorization to accept third-country asylum transfers.

**Angaur governor...***from Page 1*

According to the Angaur State Constitution, Article 9, Section 4, in the event of a vacancy in the governor's office, it shall be filled by the next highest vote-getter in the last election. In this case, that would be Steven Sali, who lost to Misch in the 2024 election.

The recall election followed a petition submitted by Angaur voters last month, the second such petition, bearing signatures from more than 25% of the state's 470 registered voters. Only 137 voters (about 30%) turned out to cast their votes.

Gov. Misch was elected in November 2024, receiving 108 votes to former governor Steven Sali's 83, a margin of 25 votes. Misch took office on January 1, 2025, and within ten months, a recall petition began circulating, leading to last Tuesday's vote.

Angaur has now set a record among Palau's 16 states during 45 years of constitutional governance by removing three governors. The first was Estavan Augustine, who was impeached by the legislature. The second was Abel Suzuki, who resigned six months before the end of his term to avoid impeachment after reportedly punching the president of the legislature. In the resulting special election, Arkagius Yamada was elected governor.

**Senate proposes...***from Page 2*

is not finalized, or if the holder sells or disposes of the property without purchasing another of equal or greater value. Additionally, holders must be able to demonstrate a source of income or financial assets sufficient to support themselves and their dependents.

**Call for...***from Page 1*

The question of whether Palau should accept refugees from abroad is not a minor administrative decision—it is a national matter with long-term implications for our security, social harmony, infrastructure, culture, and humanitarian responsibility. As such, this decision should not rest solely on executive or diplomatic agreements but on the collective will of the Palauan people.

Palau is a small island nation with limited land, resources, detention capacity, and social services. Any policy that may significantly affect our communities—especially one involving the relocation of non-citizens into our homeland—deserves full transparency, public consultation, and democratic consent. To proceed without the people's voice risks undermining public trust and national unity.

A national referendum offers the most fair, constitutional, and ethical path forward. It allows citizens to be informed, to weigh both humanitarian obligations and local realities, and to

**After Sanctions...***from Page 3*

Maritime and Admiralty Act will allow its government to "ensure a gradual and orderly transition" for its shipping register, its Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Industries (MPII) said in a statement. The amendments include new authority for Palau's president to appoint a contracted manager for the registry.

vote freely on whether Palau is truly prepared—socially, legally, and economically—to accept refugees at this time.

This is not a rejection of compassion. On the contrary, true humanitarianism respects both the dignity of those seeking refuge and the rights of citizens whose lives and communities will be directly affected. Compassion without consent is not justice.

Palau has always stood as a nation that values democracy, respect, and accountability. Allowing the people to decide through a referendum affirms our sovereignty and strengthens our democratic foundation.

Therefore, I respectfully urge our leaders to initiate a national referendum so that the people of Palau may vote openly and responsibly on this important issue.

Let the voice of the people be heard—because Palau belongs to its people.

With respect and concern for our nation's future,  
**Hadleen Medalarak**  
Concerned Citizen of the Republic of Palau

**PNG Prime Minister urges people to go online and apply for jobs**

Papua New Guinea's prime minister has urged people to go online and apply for jobs in the public service in 2026.

James Marape used his New Year's message to underline his Government's plan to use artificial intelligence systems in public service recruitment.

Marape said 2026 is the year PNG will use AI as a tool to strengthen governance and efficiency across the public service, including in recruitment and government contracts.

The prime minister says technology will help remove subjectivity, and strengthen fairness in how decisions are made. (RNZ)

