

Pacific Pulse

An annual festival in the Solomons which is now open to the public is a must-see ritual.



SOLOMONS POLICE DRAWDOWN COMMENCES

With the departure of its military component last summer, ten years after it arrived to end the ethnic tensions, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) puts the focus on assistance for the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF).

Last October, RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government signed what they call the Drawdown Strategy for the period 2013 to 2017. As the name suggests, the ultimate goal is to have RAMSI's police force – called the Participating Police Force (PPF) – hand over all its policing responsibilities to the local police.

The mission, funded with AUD 315 million from the Australian Government, concentrates on developing indigenous capacity. This includes planning for the limited reintroduction of firearms into the RSIPF, a big step after ten years of gun amnesty in the country. In the first phase, which is currently running, the RSIPF and the PPF are building the necessary infrastructure like armories and training facilities, developing regulations and training a number of selected divisions in the use of firearms. The program will only continue, if the Solomon Islands Government approves the results of this first phase.

At the moment the close protection unit, airport police, patrol boat and the police response team are being trained.

These units are also the ones most likely to be granted permission to carry firearms in the future, whereas the “normal” police officers patrolling the streets of Honiara will continue to complete their duties without the use of firearms.

– Elio Stamm

Above left: Solomon Islands PM Gordon Darcy Lilo inspects the local police force in Honiara. Above right, soccer's support is building in the country.

FOOTBALL BACK ON TRACK

Although the country successfully held the Oceania Nations Cup in 2012, the past few years have seen a decline in football development in the Solomon Islands.

While Oceania's nations competed against each other in Lawson Tama Stadium and the Telekom sponsored national S-League went into its second season 2012, there were no competitions held for the youth or at the provincial level.

In October 2013, the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) and world body FIFA intervened and investigated alleged mismanagement of soccer funds.

The president of the Solomon Islands Football Federation (SIFF), Martin Alufurai, had to resign. A normalisation committee, chaired by Australian coach instructor Ian Shaw, was installed to put football back on track. The normalisation committee will be in place until 31 December 2014 and will reorganise the administration of the federation.

Mr Shaw sees the challenges but is also fascinated by the talent he found in the country.

“The kids here are so in love with the game that they play on the street day and night; this makes them have better ball handling compared to young players in Australia”, Shaw said.

All that is needed is structures for the young talent to develop into complete players. The committee plans to establish youth academies, and S-League-teams will have to create a number of youth, women's, and maybe even Futsal and Beach-Soccer-teams.

With additional improvements to the infrastructure, especially of grounds in the provinces, Shaw and his committee are positive that Solomon Islands most popular sport is heading towards a bright future.

– Elio Stamm

PICTURES: Elio Stamm