



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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# Govt steps in

By ALEX RHEENEY

**THE National Executive Council will meet this afternoon to discuss the current impasse in the appointment of State Solicitor Isikel Mesulam as acting Attorney-General.**

Departing attorney-general Francis Damem, whose four-year contract expired on January 8, has refused to vacate the office saying he would act in the position until he was directed by Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare to leave.

The Prime Minister's media unit yesterday said Acting Prime Minister Sam Akoitai had asked for a special NEC meeting this afternoon to discuss the issue.

Public Service Minister Sinai Brown in a statement released yesterday affirmed Mr Mesulam's appointment as Acting Attorney-General, saying his promotion was based on advice and consultation with relevant state agencies.

Reiterating that the Department of Justice and Attorney-General was the key institution that advised the Government on legal and constitutional matters, the Gazelle MP said they were ensuring stability within the department, staff morale and performance were maintained. A copy of National Gazette No.G6 of 2005 dated January 14, that showed Mr Mesulam's acting appointment effective January 10, was attached to Mr Brown's statement.

"The recent negative publicity and allegations of various wrongful conduct against senior officials of the department requires the Government to act responsibly to put in place acting arrangements and to move swiftly to finalise substantive appointment of a senior and appropriately qualified Papua New Guinean to assume the post of attorney general," Mr Brown said the statement. "I therefore call upon the

## Explain 'fine'- Cops

**POLICE** have urged State Solicitor Isikel Mesulam to help identify policemen who blackmailed him to pay K1300 in "fines" following their investigations of an alleged pornographic videotape.

Port Moresby CID officer in charge Superintendent Peter Guinness said yesterday after leading a search of the government lawyer's Port Moresby home on Monday that he was not aware of the State Solicitor paying police officers K1300 in fines.

He called on Mr Mesulam to produce evidence of the payment and help them identify the rogue policemen who allegedly pocketed the money after allegations of the videotape's existence first emerged about two years ago.

However, Mr Mesulam yesterday said the payment was blackmail money and not a "fine" as reported, because unidentified police officers threatened to leak the story of their investigations to the media if they were not paid.

outgoing attorney-general, Mr Francis Damem, whose term expired on January 8, to act responsibly in accepting the acting arrangements and facilitate smooth transactions between himself and Mr Mesulam."

Police raided Mr Mesulam's Port Moresby house on Monday, confiscating a computer hard drive, videotapes and floppy diskettes as they continued their investigations into allegations of an alleged pornographic tape.

Mr Damem's view is that because Mr Mesulam is the subject of police investigations, he is not a fit person to continue as State Solicitor and acting Attorney-General.

"I don't know why the minister is hell bent on getting Mesulam appointed in the face of the allegations," Mr Damem said yesterday.



## Flooded

**AWASH:** Parts of Western Highlands Province was under water at the weekend from heavy rains. Many food gardens, houses and coffee plantations were also destroyed. Villagers (above) show part of a garden in their area that was flooded by heavy rains. The worst affected areas have been Kindeng in the South Wahgi district and Kondopina in the Dei district **Picture** by PEARSON KOLO. Report PAGE 2.

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