



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Post-Courier

WEEKEND EDITION

52 Pages Friday-Sunday August 19-21, 2005 **Since 1969**

Issue No. 9244

website: <http://www.postcourier.com.pg>

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O'Neill in court



Our hero

A WELCOME FIT FOR A QUEEN: Papua New Guinea's South Pacific sprint queen Mae Koime was given a rousing traditional welcome yesterday when she arrived from the world championships in Helsinki. Koime, 21, was dubbed the Track Queen at the recent Mini South Pacific Games in Palau where she dominated the sprints, winning gold in the 100m, 200m and 400m and anchored the team in the 400m relay gold run. Yesterday, her parents — mum Merolyn and dad Kaina and Baimuru relatives — were at the airport to give their "queen" a well-deserved Gulf Province home-coming. **REPORT PAGE 50. Picture by JOE IVAHARIA.**

OPPOSITION parliamentarians yesterday slammed the arrest of their leader Peter O'Neill, saying it was orchestrated by a Government hell-bent on creating a one-party system.

Deputy Opposition Leader and Markham MP Andrew Baing and Milne Bay Governor Tim Neville lashed out at the Government for continuous attempts to destabilise the Opposition ranks through the arrests and charging of notable Opposition MPs.

Speaking during a joint press conference in Port Moresby yesterday with the Ialibu-Pangia MP as well as parliamentarians Kimson Kare (Wewak), Isaac Taitibe (Alotau) and John Koiri (Obura-Wonenara), Mr Baing and Mr Neville vowed to clash with the Government and unearth issues on how it was performing during the October sitting of Parliament.

Mr O'Neill briefly appeared before senior magistrate Allan Kopi with his lawyer Scott Reid at the Waigani Committal Court yesterday where the seven charges of misappropriation and one charge of conspiracy were formally put to him.

Mr Neville, who was charged with bribery early this year but had his case dismissed due to

By DOMINIC KRAU and ALEX RHEENEY

insufficient evidence, accompanied Mr O'Neill to the court hearing.

The Opposition Leader is alleged to have conspired with former National Provident Fund (now NASFUND) board chairman Jimmy Maladina, one Jack Awela, and Shuichi Taniguchi and Kazu Kobayashi — both of Japanese construction firm Kumagai Gumi — to defraud the NPF by fraudulently requesting the "acceleration" of the NPF tower project funds by K2.65 million.

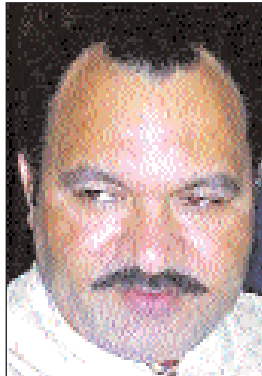
This allegedly occurred between December 1998 and February 1999.

Mr O'Neill was arrested and charged by police on Wednesday and released on a K1000 police bail, which was converted to a court bail yesterday.

The hearing was subsequently adjourned to September 20 and the bail extended after police prosecutor Constable Koniu Polon revealed he was not ready to proceed as the files were not ready.

On whether he would vacate the office in light of the criminal proceedings, Mr O'Neill said: "I don't think it will be fair to anyone for me to immediately step down and have a vacuum in the leadership.

"But should the courts



PETER O'NEILL



ANDREW BAING

proceed to a situation where I am found guilty of any of the charges, of course, I will vacate the Opposition Leader's office but its too premature at the moment.

"Just because someone points a finger at me does not mean that I run."

Police Commissioner Sam Inguba has denied Mr O'Neill's arrest was politically motivated, saying the leader was implicated in a major fraud investigation.

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