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# PM sacks Aini

## Defence Minister ousted in fall-out from Moti inquiry

By ALEX RHEENEY

PRIME Minister Sir Michael Somare has sacked his Defence Minister Martin Aini.

The termination concludes a running battle between the Grand Chief and the now disbanded Defence Force board of inquiry, which Mr Aini set up.

Cabinet had sanctioned and gave the inquiry K1 million to investigate how an army CASA aircraft was used to fly out wanted Australian lawyer Julian Moti to the Solomon Islands.

It is believed Mr Aini was shown the door after he revealed over the weekend that he was pressured by Sir Michael in Parliament last Friday to sign instruments to disband the inquiry.

The inquiry, chaired by Supreme Court and Defence Force judge Justice Gibbs Salika and assisted by commissioners Brigadier General (retired) Tony Huai and Daniel Liosi unsuccessfully tried to get the Prime Minister to appear.

It even issued a summons for him, leading to accusations by Sir Michael that the inquiry was overstepping its jurisdiction, operating illegally and was biased in its proceedings.

Counsels assisting the inquiry have submitted that Sir Michael, his chief of staff Leonard Louma, Chief Secretary Joshua Kalinoe and other top public servants and PNGDF soldiers be charged with various criminal offences over their alleged role in aiding Moti's

secret escape in October last year.

Their submissions are expected to form the gist of the inquiry's final report to the Defence Minister, but it is not known if their recommendations will now be acted on in light of Mr Aini's sacking yesterday by Sir Michael during a special Cabinet meeting.

The Kavieng MP's dumping has shaken the National Alliance-Pangu Pati partnership in the current coalition Government.

Pangu parliamentary leader Sir Rabbie Namaliu recently threatened to leave with his party if his party member got the boot.

Attempts by the *Post-Courier* last night to contact Sir Rabbie were unsuccessful as he was in an economic ministers meeting but party officials indicated that Pangu executives will state their party's position on the sacking today.

The Prime Minister's press secretary Betha Somare advised the media of Mr Aini's sacking in an e-mail late yesterday afternoon.

"I wish to advise all media that the Prime Minister has decommissioned . . . Martin Aini as Minister for Defence. All appointments and removal of ministers as members of the National Executive Council are made by the Prime Minister whose prerogative it is to remove any members who ceases to have the confidence of the Prime Minister," she said, but did not indicate who was acting Defence Minister.

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ALL RISE: Defence Force Judge Gibbs Salika packs up yesterday after the winding down of the aborted Moti Inquiry. Picture: ALEX RHEENEY.

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