

Zurenuoc calls for probe into land sales

SECRETARY for the Department of Provincial and LLG Manasupe Zurenuoc has issued instructions to the department and its lawyers to investigate the alleged sale of customary land on New Hanover Island. Mr Zurenuoc said while confirming this yesterday it would be interesting to find out if the Minister for Lands at that time in 2007, the Department of Lands and the Provincial Administration of New Ireland were satisfied that the landowners no longer required their customary land. He said this was because in line with the Lands Act on acquisition of customary land, all customary land like in New Hanover must only be acquired when the State was satisfied that the landowners no-longer needed the land. The Post-Courier understands it was gazetted on October 16, 2007 (No. G161), that Special Business and Agriculture Leases were issued to four landowner companies for a period of 99 years. This included Central New Hanover Ltd (56,592ha), Umbu-kul Ltd (25,108ha), Tabut Ltd (11,864ha) and Rakubana Development Pty Ltd which in total leases cover an area of 118,864ha compared to the overall area of 120,000ha of the Island.

Mr Manasupe said the investigations would also look into the Supplementary Agreement to the Sales and Purchase Agreement of Customary lands in New Hanover Island in New Ireland between Tutuman Development Ltd and a Singaporean company Palma Hacienda Ltd for K4 million. Documents confirmed the customary land in New Hanover was acquired by the State and it granted a Special Agriculture and Business lease to the four landowner companies in 2007, for 99 years. It is alleged that these landowners then leased to Tutuman Development Ltd who now sold to Palma Hacienda Ltd. The land sold are State Lease Volume 17 Folio 017 Allotment 885C Lovongai in Tabut (11,864 ha); Vol 17, Folio 18, Allotment 887C Lavongai in central New Hanover an area of 56,592ha; and Vol 019, Folio, Allotment 886C Lavongai in Umbukul an area of 25,108ha totalling 93,564ha. The landowners say the implications are that the 99-year lease to a foreign company covers at least four generations and New Hanover people will live under foreign rules, their land and society destroyed and serious destructions done to their terrestrial and marine environment.