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Sir Michael Somare should pay his own medical bills: Sir Mekere

The Member for Moresby North-West and Minister for Public Enterprises Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta said today that he was personally shocked to learn that the Government had been paying Sir Michael Somare's medical expenses and the cost of keeping his entourage in Singapore.

Sir Mekere said that the report in *The National* on 05 September that the State has paid more than K3.7 million, K2.7 million of which was for "minders and visitors", is simply outrageous.

"I am not being mean or discourteous. I wish The Chief a speedy recovery. I am delighted that he appears to be well enough to have come home," Sir Mekere said. "But private medical expenses are private medical expenses. All Members of Parliament have access to medical insurance, and none of us should expect the State to pay our private bills."

Sir Mekere said that this was a typical example of the way the Somare family had abused public money. "They seem to have no sense of the differentiation between public and private. When Bart Philemon and I were in the Opposition, we frequently pointed this out, criticising the aerial PMV Falcon jet, for example, and the manner in which the Somare family abused the privileges of Mirigini House and the office of the Prime Minister."

"In a statement to the Parliament on 18 May 2010, I challenged then Prime Minister Somare 'to appoint an independent auditor to compute what it cost the nation as PM and what he has cost the nation. But I can make a pretty good guess: what the nation spent on my behalf in 3 years would be less than 3 months expenditure on the current PM'."

"I made that statement without realising the full extent of the abuse of public resources by the Somare family. When I became the Minister for Public Enterprises, I discovered that the Somare Government owed Air Niugini K30 million for the

operation of the aerial PMV. The Falcon had clearly been going up and down to Singapore, to Fiji for golf, to Wewak for parties, wherever the family wanted it to go – but they never paid the bill. So when Air Niugini agreed to buy the Falcon from the Government, this unpaid bill of K30 million had to be deducted from the purchase price.”

Sir Mekere said that the fact was many months ago Sir Michael took leave, appointed an Acting Prime Minister, and went to Singapore for medical treatment.

“He did not fall sick whilst on duty travel. He gave up the position of Prime Minister but still took a whole entourage with him – family members, Protocol officers, Police officers – for him to lie in a hospital bed. And it was presumed the people of Papua New Guinea would foot the bill. Meantime his chosen appointee Hon Sam Abal ran up a bill of hundreds of thousands of kina staying in a Port Moresby hotel instead of his own home. Who paid for this, I wonder?”

Sir Mekere said that when he was the Prime Minister, he regularly went to Brisbane for medical check-ups. “Not once did the State pay for my ticket, for my wife’s ticket, for my medical bills, nor for my accommodation. They were private visits for personal reasons. It is common sense that a Prime Minister should expect to pay for such trips and for his own medical treatment himself.”

Sir Mekere said that the report in *The National* noted that the Prime Minister’s Department did ‘not have any allowances within its budget for the medical expenses of the Prime Minister’. “So who approved this expenditure?” Sir Mekere asked. “That is a breach of the Financial Management Act and whoever approved the expenditure should be held accountable.”

Sir Mekere said that the Somare family should re-pay the State all the medical expenses and costs associated with their recent stay in Singapore.

“It is an insult to Papua New Guineans that government money has been used to pay these costs. Our own health services are so run down; they are not staffed properly; people are dying daily for want of drugs, of equipment that works, and of accurate diagnosis. Every day we hear of a Papua New Guinean family fund-raising to send a family member overseas for medical treatment that is not available here. These people don’t have a government department that forks out millions for them.”

“Please Sir Michael, have some decency and assure the nation that you will pay for your own medical expenses,” Sir Mekere said. “Having a clear conscience in this regard will give you peace of mind and help your recovery.”

Mekere Morauta KCMG MP

*Member for Moresby North-West and
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