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A week of graft-related headlines

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IT is significant that the decision by Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib to step down came on the heels of reports that he now faces a second charge when his case comes up for hearing in a Brisbane court on Aug 19 and after news on corruption had hogged the headlines throughout the week.

It started on Monday with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim telling Parliament that the Government was unhappy with current measures to fight graft.

He went on to state that more funds and manpower would be made available to the Anti-Corruption Agency. This was in addition to proposed amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act 1961, which are in the final stages of being drafted.

It was during this address that he was asked by Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang of the progress of the ACA's investigation into the case involving the Selangor Menteri Besar.

Muhammad was detained at Australia's Brisbane Airport on Dec 22 and charged the following day with failing to declare cash amounting to A\$1.2 million (about RM2.4 million).

The offence, under section 15 of Australia's Financial Transactions Reports Act 1988, carries a maximum fine of A\$5,000 and/or two years' jail.

When his case came up for mention on Friday, the prosecutor said that an additional charge would be preferred against him under section 29 (3) of the same Act and it carries a maximum fine of A\$10,000 and/or five years' jail.

Anwar told Lim there was already a provision in the Prevention of Corruption Act 1961 to enable the ACA to investigate people suspected of amassing wealth beyond their normal means.

On Wednesday, another piece of corruption-related information was made known to Parliament by Parliamentary Secretary in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Azmi Khalid, when he told the Dewan Rakyat that four State Executive Councillors were being investigated by the agency. This figure was revised to eight when he was met by the Press at the Parliament lobby.

The following day, also in Parliament, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Nazri Abdul Aziz told members that four senior ACA officers were in Australia to investigate the origin of the RM2.4 million Muhammad was caught with.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad capped the week's events when, in response to questions by the Press upon his return from the Gulf and Pakistan on Thursday, he said the ACA had a free hand to investigate the allegations of corruption against Muhammad.

"I don't want (my statement) to influence the ACA. It's up to the ACA to investigate," he declared.

At the Press conference yesterday after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting during which Muhammad made his decision to resign, Dr Mahathir said: "It is his own wish to resign so that any investigation conducted will not affect Umno's image and we will only consider his position in the party after the decision in Brisbane on whether he is guilty or not."

He admitted that the case against Muhammad, an Umno vice-president, had

affected the party.

"We are more concerned with Umno. He himself felt that he was responsible and it is his right to make a decision," he said.

And, perhaps, as a warning to others in Umno, he added: "Party members should not smear the party's name by doing something that may cast aspersions on the party."