

11/04/1997

ACA has free hand to conduct probes, says PM

THE Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) has a free hand to investigate allegations of corruption and property ownership involving Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

"I don't want to influence the ACA, it's up to the ACA to investigate," Dr Mahathir told reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport, Subang, on his return from Islamabad after his visits to Kuwait, Bahrain and Pakistan.

He was asked to comment on the latest developments on Muhammad's case, including a report in the Brisbane Courier Mail that Muhammad had acquired properties in Australia worth millions of ringgit, and on why Muhammad did not deny the report.

On Monday, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told the Dewan Rakyat that the ACA was investigating Muhammad for failing to declare RM2.4 million in cash when leaving Australia. Anwar said the ACA was also looking into claims made in the Brisbane Courier Mail report.

Yesterday at the Dewan Rakyat, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Nazri Abdul Aziz, said four senior ACA officers were already in Australia to investigate the origin of the RM2.4 million found on Muhammad when he was detained at the Brisbane airport in December.

The officers will also investigate the Australian newspaper report.

"The ACA has been questioning Muhammad since he was detained at the Brisbane airport for violating Australian regulations which require a person to declare any amount of money above A\$5,000 (A\$1 = RM1.99) in his or her possession when leaving the country.

"The ACA will investigate the origin of the RM2.4 million found on Muhammad," Nazri said in reply to questions raised during the debate on the allocations to the Prime Minister's Department in the Supplementary Supply (1996 and 1997) Bill.

Dr Mahathir said the ACA will need to determine if these reports were based on facts. "We have to see whether there is basis or not."

Asked why Muhammad did not deny the newspaper report, Dr Mahathir said: "I know nothing of this matter... wait for the ACA (investigations)."

On March 30, DAP secretary general Lim Kit Siang said the Brisbane Courier Mail had reported that Muhammad was building a RM1 million house on a piece of land valued at another RM1 million in the Sovereign Islands. The report purportedly said that Muhammad and his wife had bought 4,500ha of cattle, sheep and grain property in Currajong Park in Western Queensland for RM5 million. They were also reported to be interested in buying more properties worth RM12 million in Australia.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on news reports yesterday that eight State Executive Councillors from six states were being investigated for alleged involvement in corrupt practices.

"This is normal. If there is suspicion that they are involved in corruption, the ACA must do its job to find out whether there is basis or not," he said.

The eight State Exco members are one each from Johor, Pahang, Kedah, Sabah and Selangor, and three from Malacca. The cases relate to land deals, house purchases and "favours" in getting government approval for certain projects.

Asked whether the power of prosecution for corruption cases should be reverted to the ACA Director-General, the Prime Minister said it was better that the Attorney-General (A-G) study such cases.

"I do not know the finer points but usually if there is a case, it must be submitted to the A-G. So, it is better for the A-G to study the case to find out whether it is correct in law," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about a suggestion he made in Manama, Bahrain, that Islamic countries seek a consensus on Islamic finance and banking as there are some doubts on the use of Islamic instruments.

He said the matter was discussed in very broad terms, but reiterated that initially Malaysia hopes to cooperate with Bahrain on the matter and other countries can join in later if they are interested.

On his visits to the three countries, Dr Mahathir it was "a successful trip".

"We have established good contacts with the governments of Kuwait, Bahrain and Pakistan. It looks like we can follow through on many of the issues that were discussed."

When asked about his first meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Dr Mahathir said Pakistan is interested in studying Malaysia's development model.

"Yes, this is the first time we met. During the last Organisation of Islamic Conference meeting, I was in Saudi Arabia. I called him (Nawaz) up and he was very keen to establish good relations with Malaysia.

"(This time) we discussed many things, especially the possibility of Pakistan sending government officials and politicians to study the way we develop our country," he said.

(END)