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Muhammad still under ACA probe (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The Anti-Corruption Agency's investigation of former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib is still on, ACA director-general Datuk Shafee Yahaya said today.

He said the agency had completed the first part of its investigation which started the moment Muhammad was detained for failing to declare more than A\$1.2 million (RM2.95 million) when he left Brisbane International Airport on Dec 26, 1996.

"The ACA has been investigating the matter since that day and this includes going through all his (Muhammad's) accounts and assets to ascertain the sources of his wealth.

"We have completed parts of it and have submitted the investigation papers to the Attorney-General's Chamber for a further directive before proceeding with further action.

"We are still investigating the second part of it and once it's completed, we will forward the papers to the A-G's Chamber."

However, Shafee declined to comment on the recommendations made by the ACA to the A-G's Chamber on the matter so far.

Although he also declined to elaborate on the two parts of the ACA investigations, it was reported early last year that the agency was investigating Muhammad and his two former aides following the discovery of large amounts of cash in Brisbane and Shah Alam.

The ACA started the first investigation following a report lodged by Pas Youth secretary Mahfuz Omar with the Selangor ACA in Shah Alam on Dec 29.

This came in the wake of an admission by Muhammad that the money which he failed to declare at the Brisbane airport while en route to New Zealand belonged to his three brothers - Datuk Raduan, Datuk Othman and Hassan.

The second investigation was connected to the conversion of a 40ha forest area in Bukit Sungai Putih, Hulu Langat, involving Muhammad's former aides.

It was reported that the land was gazetted as a forest reserve in 1972, but the State Executive Council took a decision in 1990 to degazette it.

The land was originally part of the Bukit Sungai Putih forest reserve and had been earmarked for mixed development after a logging licence was given out to a company.

It was reported that the ACA would call all parties involved in the decision-making to give their statements, including Muhammad.

The others were State Forestry Department officers and State Executive Councillors, past and present.

One of the two aides was said to be found with about RM1.5 million in his car when an ACA team went to his house in Shah Alam in December 1996.

The ACA commenced investigation into this case following a report lodged at the ACA headquarters. The complainant was not named.

Yesterday, Muhammad told Malaysian journalists in Brisbane that he had declared his assets to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the ACA after he was detained in Australia.

"The ACA checked our accounts and scrutinised the records and it is up to them whether to take any action against me," he said, adding whatever he told the ACA was consistent with the evidence in court.

The Brisbane District Court had on Friday, acquitted Muhammad on two charges of falsely declaring the money he took into Australia in December 1996 and failing to declare more than A\$1.2 million when he left the

country.

The money was seized by the Australian police following his arrest and was released on Friday.

During his trial, Muhammad told the court that he had used his wife's name, Puan Sri Asbi Rohani Hasnan, to purchase assets in Australia and New Zealand.

This included a plot of land valued at A\$460,000 and a A\$460,000 bungalow at Sovereign Island, Gold Coast; a farm in Currajong valued at A\$3.7 million, a NZ\$500,000 house (RM1.05 million) and two plots of land valued at about NZ\$4 million in New Zealand.

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