

Taib threatens law suit over corruption claims
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Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud today threatened legal action over reports he received millions of dollars in kickbacks from nine Japanese shipping firms.

Taib has been in the spotlight after Japanese newspaper reports last month said companies importing logs from Malaysia paid him at least RM32 million over seven years.

The reports said the money was handed over to facilitate trade with timber-rich Sarawak, and was paid via a brokering company in Hong Kong.

Taib's press secretary, Amin Sahmat, said today the chief minister had been in touch with his lawyers over the reports.

"We just want to say that he instructed his solicitors to take any appropriate legal action to clear his name," Amin told AFP.

He said the chief minister's lawyers would be examining reports to determine if they were defamatory.

"It depends on the lawyers," he said.

Pressure mounts

Pressure has been mounting for an inquiry, with Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi late yesterday saying it was up to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) to take up the matter, and that a formal report was needed.

"It should be a proper report. If that is done, then investigations can be carried out," he told reporters.

Newspaper reports today said the ACA's acting director-general Ahmad Said Hamdan had promised the agency would look into the allegations.

Citing unnamed sources, Japanese newspaper reports late March said the nine firms, in a cartel for importing logs, paid abnormally large commission fees to the Hong-Kong based broker, linked to Taib and his family.

It said the firms in the cartel had paid the fees to the broker, Regent Star, which merely negotiated the amount of the payments without providing any actual brokering services.

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