

JIT gave 'incorrect' information to Saudi govt about Al-Azizia Mills, court told

ISLAMABAD: The last prosecution witness in the Al-Azizia reference admitted before the accountability court on Monday that the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) provided 'incorrect' information to the Saudi government about Al-Azizia/Hill Metal Establishment (HME) owned by Hussain Nawaz, son of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

During the cross-examination, the ex-premier's lead counsel Khawaja Haris asked investigation officer Mehboob Alam about a letter of credit related to transport of scrap of machinery of Ahli Steel Mills from Sharjah to Jeddah that was submitted by Hussain Nawaz before the Supreme Court.

The JIT, in its request seeking mutual legal assistance from the Saudi government, mentioned the wrong place of origin as instead of Sharjah, the investigators sought information about the machinery transported from Dubai.

Moreover, he admitted that the description of goods as given in the exhibited document was different from description of goods transported from Ahli Steel Mills as given in the letter of credit.

Mr Alam said that he had neither recorded the statement of any witness nor issued notice to any witness to ascertain the cost at which Al-Azizia Steel Company and HME had been set up. "It did not come to my notice during investigation that Hill Metals Establishment was not established in one go rather it was established gradually over a period from 2006 to 2014," he admitted.

He accepted before the court that he had gone through the statement of Hussain Nawaz recorded by the JIT which probed the Panama Papers scandal.

“Even after going through that statement it had not come to my notice that accused Hussain Nawaz Sharif had stated that the Steel Mill was not established all at once rather initially HME was set up as a Scrap Processing Plant,” said the witness.

During the cross-examination, Mr Alam admitted that no witness who had appeared before him stated that any money was sent by accused Nawaz Sharif to accused Hussain and Hassan Nawaz to fund their expenses while they were studying in the UK.

He said: “No witness had stated before me that accused Nawaz Sharif had been sending money to accused Hussain Nawaz and Hassan Nawaz for meeting their day-to-day expenditure from the year 1995 to 1999 or thereafter.”

He added that during investigation he had not come across any bank account of Nawaz Sharif through which any money was sent by him to his sons for any of the aforesaid purposes.

Mr Alam revealed that he had recorded the statement of a witness – Jahangir Ahmed – who had produced Mr Sharif’s tax record, adding that the witness had not produced the tax record of any company wherein Mr Sharif was a shareholder.

Moreover, the investigation officer admitted that he had not collected record from the SECP regarding any company in which Mr Sharif was a shareholder.

The proceedings in the Al-Azizia reference were adjourned till Tuesday.