

Friday, March 23, 2007

11 years for money laundering

Buena Park man, 58, sentenced today for cleansing proceeds of criminal operations, tax evasion and flight.

By LARRY WELBORN
The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA – A 58-year-old Buena Park tax preparer was sentenced to 11 years in prison today for his role in a money-laundering scheme that included \$28 million in unreported income, prosecutors said.

Yakoob Habib pleaded guilty last month to laundering millions of dollars from several criminal operations, tax evasion and flight on bail, said California Deputy Attorney General Hardy Gold.

Habib was a certified tax preparer who failed to report nearly \$10 million that flowed through his personal accounts and \$18 million that went through his corporation, Gold said.

He first came to the attention of state investigators in 2001 as part of a criminal conspiracy to steal millions from the state's Medi-Cal fund by running fraudulent clinical laboratories that billed for blood testing that either wasn't done or wasn't authorized by doctors.

Gold said that an investigation revealed Habib illegally transferred millions from that and other criminal operations to people in the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Russia and Latvia.

Co-defendant Surinder Singh Panshi, 74, a former physician who directed the clinical labs in Orange, Riverside and Los Angeles counties, was sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2003. He was already serving an 18-year term in New Jersey for money-laundering.

Habib pleaded guilty in the fraudulent billing case in 2002 and promised to cooperate with authorities in exchange for a lenient sentence. But Habib later breached that agreement when he left the country without permission and later went underground, Gold said.

Contact the writer: (714) 834-3784 or lwelborn@ocregister.com