

Justin Trudeau faces corruption probe related to millions in bribes



Ottawa, February 13 (RHC)-- Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is facing investigations for illegally protecting an engineering firm SNC Lavalin from criminal fraud and corruption charges on bribing millions of dollars to the Libyan government. Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner launched the probe.

Trudeau claimed that he welcomed a probe into whether officials improperly tried to help the construction company. Independent ethics commissioner Mario Dion said he would look into allegations, first raised by the Globe and Mail newspaper, that Trudeau officials last year had pressured Jody Wilson-Raybould, when she was the country's justice minister and attorney general, to help SNC-Lavalin avoid a trial over bribery and corruption charges linked to Libyan contracts.

Although Dion's office has only limited powers to sanction wrongdoing, the probe shows the affair may become more problematic for Trudeau as he prepares for a close-run re-election bid this October.

Wilson-Raybould was unexpectedly demoted last month and given the more junior post of veterans affairs minister, prompting speculation she was being punished for insisting the trial go ahead rather than allowing SNC-Lavalin to pay a fine.

Last week, Trudeau denied that his office tried to pressure Wilson-Raybould to make a deal with SNC-Lavalin, which faces fraud and corruption charges linked to allegations that former executives paid bribes

to win Libyan contracts under Muammar Gaddafi's government, which was overthrown in 2011.

The company allegedly paid \$48 million USD to Libyan officials which were intended to influence government decision making. It was also accused of defrauding Libyan companies of about \$130 million.

Wilson-Raybould's father, Bill, said on Facebook that she had been "demoted because she would not 'play ball' with the Big Boys who run the Liberal Party." The leader of the Conservatives, Andrew Scheer, said in a recent newspaper editorial Monday Trudeau was "a fraud." "Obviously Justin Trudeau's trying to hide something," Scheer said. "All we have to go on is his word."

SNC has argued it should be allowed to avoid a trial because the executives accused of wrongdoing have left the company and it has overhauled ethics and compliance systems. SNC-Lavalin is based in the politically powerful province of Quebec, where the Liberals need to capture more seats to have any chance of winning a second successive majority government.

Justice Minister David Lametti told CTV Sunday it was still theoretically possible he could direct federal prosecutors to drop the idea of a trial. One source with knowledge of the matter said it was not unusual for an attorney general to have "robust conversations" with colleagues as they gathered data in such situations.

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