

FIFA Audit and Compliance Committee member Lai pleads guilty to corruption in US investigation

---

28/04/2017



FIFA Audit and Compliance Committee member Richard Lai has been provisionally banned for 90 days after he pleaded guilty to charges of receiving nearly \$1 million (£773,000/€915,000) in bribes as prosecutors in the United States widened their corruption investigation to Asia.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) official and head of the Guam Football Association, who has also been provisionally suspended by the AFC, accepted two charges of wire fraud conspiracy in front of US District Judge Pamela Chen in Brooklyn.

American citizen Lai admitted being paid \$100,000 (£77,000/€91,000) by an AFC official who was then running for the FIFA Presidency against disgraced Sepp Blatter in 2011.

The money was allegedly used in exchange for Lai's vote and support.

It was also revealed that Lai received a further \$850,000 (£657,000/€777,000) between 2009 and 2014 from various officials in the Asian region to help them further their influence within the AFC and FIFA.

According to prosecutors, the 55-year-old has also pleaded guilty to failing to disclose foreign bank accounts and agreed to forfeit a total of \$1.1 million (£851,000/€1 million).

"The chairman of the adjudicatory chamber of the independent Ethics Committee, Hans-Joachim Eckert, has provisionally banned Richard K. Lai, the President of the Guam Football Association, for a duration of 90 days," a FIFA statement read.

"The duration of the ban may be extended for an additional period not exceeding 45 days.

"During this time, the above-mentioned individual is banned from all football activities at both national and international level.

"The ban comes into force immediately."

It is alleged the \$100,000 was given to Lai by Mohammed bin Hammam, who initially ran for the top job at world football's governing body six years ago, before he withdrew three days before the election.

However, he is not named by prosecutors nor Lai, however.

The Qatari was banned for life in 2011 for his part in the cash-for-votes scandal, but later had this annulled at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) who found "insufficient evidence" to support the sanction.

He was banned for life again by FIFA in December 2012.

Bridget Rohde, acting US attorney for the Eastern District of New York, said Lai - the first Asian official to be involved in the US corruption investigation - had "abused the trust placed in him as a soccer official in order to line his own pockets" and that he would "now be held to account".

In a statement, the AFC said: "The Chairman of the Asian Football Confederation Disciplinary and Ethics Committee has provisionally suspended Richard Lai (Guam) from football with immediate effect under the AFC's Disciplinary and Ethics Code following Mr Lai's guilty plea to charges relating to fraud at a court appearance in Brooklyn, New York on Thursday evening.

"The AFC will make no further comment until the investigation process is completed."

Over 40 people and companies have been indicted in the US Federal investigation into widespread corruption within world football.

It largely centres on a total of \$200 million (£156 million/€187 million) in alleged

bribes and kickbacks, which were allegedly solicited and received by various football officials concerning marketing and broadcast rights.

American authorities say the money was funneled through the country using US banks.

---