

# Punjab and Haryana High Court in another soup

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A vigilance department report based on surveillance of suspected extremists that unravelled a murky nexus between touts and judges has landed the Punjab and Haryana High Court in another controversy. Following the surveillance, investigators alleged that cases were being fixed.



But on Thursday, a day after the Punjab vigilance department report pointed out taped evidence of corruption in the state's judicial system, top Punjab government officials evaded the issue.

The vigilance department reports were prepared after state authorities allowed tapping of two mobile phones of people linked to Sikh militants trying to re-group in Punjab.

But what the tapping revealed was a deep malaise in the state's judicial system. The reports clearly indicate the names of two sitting high court judges and officers in the lower judiciary. These stated that touts were charging money for fixing up cases in the high court and lower courts, manipulating listing of cases and even affecting appointments of judges in lower courts.

Top Punjab government officials Thursday chose to avoid the controversy even as the office of the Punjab governor issued a clarification saying that Governor S.F. Rodrigues had not forwarded any communication to the prime minister's office (PMO).

"No communication about the said report has ever been sent by the governor of Punjab to the prime minister's office in New Delhi," an official spokesman clarified here.

Punjab government's media adviser Harcharan Bains said: "I am out of station and have not read the report. I will comment only after seeing it."

Attempts to reach Chief Secretary Ramesh Inder Singh failed. His office staff, after asking about the issue to be discussed, said that he was busy in meetings.

The reports, forwarded by top vigilance department officials to Punjab's Advocate General H.S. Mattewal throughout 2008, have been sent to the Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for further action, it was reported Thursday.

High court officials here refused to speak on the matter.

Controversies are nothing new to this high court.

The last one to rock it was the cash-for-judgement scam in which the names of two women high court judges, Justices Nirmal Yadav and Nirmaljit Kaur, figured after a packet containing Rs 1.5 mn (15 lakh) 'mistakenly' landed at the house of Justice Nirmaljit Kaur Aug last year.

The packet was purportedly meant for Justice Nirmal Yadav and the scam led to the arrest of former Haryana additional advocate general Sanjeev Bansal and others. The scam exposed the lawyer-judge-businessman nexus in the high court.

In the same high court 25 out of 27 judges went on protest mass casual leave - a thing unprecedented and unheard of in Indian judiciary - April 19, 2004. The protesting judges were against the then chief justice B.K. Roy summoning two of them to seek an explanation about taking the membership of a controversial and illegal golf club near here.

The golf club's case was pending before the high court when the two judges became its members.

The virtual 'strike' by the judges created an uproar nationally in the judicial community forcing the Chief Justice of India to summon the three topmost judges of the high court and severely admonish them.

In June 2002, then high court chief justice Arun B. Saharya withdrew work from three judges whose name figured in a recruitment scam in the Punjab Public Service Commission (PPSC) and its chairman Ravinder Pal Singh Sidhu.

While the children of two judges benefited with class-I government jobs in Sidhu's cash-for-job scam, the third judge got several of his candidates through.

While the PPSC scam controversy lingered, the judges, got their jobs back after a while.

The case of V. Ramaswami, a former chief justice of this high court, reached parliament for impeachment in 1993 after he was accused of financial irregularities and misuse of official position during his tenure here.

However, the impeachment of Ramaswami, who became a Supreme Court judge after his tenure here, did not take place due to divisions in parliament over the issue.