

Full Court meet on making declared assets public

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Meeting sequel to Nariman declining to be amicus curiae

Now, disclosure by judges is purely voluntary

New Delhi: Stung by the criticism of judges' refusal to disclose their assets, Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan has convened a Full Court meeting for next week to ascertain the views of brother judges on the need for making public the assets declared by judges to the CJI.

Privileged sources told *The Hindu* that the CJI has called the meeting so that the Full Court could come out with a decision whether or not judges should make the declaration of assets public. At present, disclosure is purely voluntary and judges cannot be compelled to furnish such information to the CJI.

The meeting is a sequel to jurist Fali Nariman declining to be *amicus curiae* to assist the Delhi High Court, which on January 19 stayed an order passed by the Central Information Commission directing the Supreme Court Registry to furnish information in the possession of the CJI on disclosure of assets by the judges.

Mr. Nariman informed the High Court that as he did not agree with the stand of the judiciary, he could not be a friend of the court. The former CJI, J.S. Verma, has also openly criticised the stand of the judiciary not to make public the assets disclosed by judges voluntarily to the CJI.

It was during Justice Verma's tenure that the Full Court passed a resolution in May 1997, asking Supreme Court judges to disclose the assets to the CJI and High Court judges to give such information to the Chief Justice concerned.

Justice Balakrishnan, in his interview to *The Hindu* a few days ago, contended that "the information about declaration of assets by judges is personally kept with the CJI and the Chief Justices of High Courts. The public will have a right to know these details if there is a legislative mandate. But at present there is no such legislation."

According to the CJI, "the fact that this is done under an informal resolution dated May 7, 1997 shows that it is purely voluntary and not required to be given under any legal provision."