

HOW IT BEGAN; THE MEN WHO CHANGED IT ALL

1997: A full-court meeting of Supreme Court judges makes it mandatory for senior judges to declare their assets to their respective chief justices.

2007: A Delhiite, Subhash Aggarwal, appeals to the Chief Information Commission against the SC's refusal to answer his question whether judges declare assets.

January 6, 2009: CIC directs SC to furnish information.

January 16: Supreme Court refuses to accept commission's ruling; challenges it in the Delhi High Court.

March 24: High court stays commission's ruling.

June 27: Law minister Veerappa Moily says a new Bill on judges' assets declaration coming.

August 3: Govt forced to withdraw Bill in Rajya Sabha after members oppose a clause that keeps judges' assets confidential.

August 21: Karnataka High Court judge D.V. Shylendra Kumar questions Chief Justice of India's opposition to judges declaring assets.

August 23: Punjab and Haryana High Court judge K. Kannan becomes first judge to declare assets voluntarily. CJI says there is no unanimity in SC on the issue.

August 24: Madras High Court judge K. Chandru offers to declare assets.

August 25: Shylendra Kumar declares assets.

August 26: Supreme Court judges decide to declare their assets.



J.S. VERMA

In 1997, the former CJI made the issue public through a resolution for mandatory declaration of assets by judges.



JUSTICE K. KANNAN

The Punjab and Haryana HC judge was the first to declare his assets voluntarily.



JUSTICE D.V. SHYLENDRA KUMAR

First judge to question CJI K.G. Balakrishnan's reluctance to let judges declare their wealth.



PRASHANT BHUSHAN

A Supreme Court lawyer, he actively lobbied with the judges, asking them to voluntarily declare their assets.



SUBHASH CHANDRA AGGARWAL

His Right to Information application seeking judges' wealth details set up Supreme Court's disclosure decision eventually.

Bowing to all-round pressure, Supreme Court judges, in a sudden and unexpected move on Wednesday decided to declare their assets, shedding their decades-old reluctance to open themselves to public scrutiny.

The decision came after a full court meeting, which lasted over two hours in the evening.

"There was unanimity among all the judges who attended the meeting that they should declare their assets," a court official said, requesting anonymity.

The wealth details of judges are likely to be posted on the Supreme Court website. "How and when, the modalities for these would be worked out soon," said the official.

This decision will apply to all the 24 judges of the Supreme Court, and is expected to inspire the 593 high court judges to follow suit.

Former chief justice of India J.S. Verma, who started the process almost 12 years ago, welcomed the decision: "I am very happy that the higher judiciary has finally kept its dignity intact."

The credit for this decision goes to three high court judges who spoke out in the last few days about their willingness to allow public scrutiny of their assets, forcing a reluctant Supreme Court to yield.

Karnataka high court judge D.V. Shylendra Kumar, fired the first shot openly questioning chief justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan's right to oppose declaration of assets on behalf of all other judges.

Punjab and Haryana high court judge K. Kannan followed it up by voluntarily declaring his wealth. A day after, Madras high court judge K. Chandru declared he was willing to go public with details of his assets.

Many Supreme Court judges were reportedly unhappy with the government's failed attempt to bring a bill in the Rajya Sabha on August 3, which had proposed to keep the judges assets confidential.

It must have a difficult decision for the Supreme Court after Chief Justice Balakrishnan took a stand against disclosures saying it will leave judges vulnerable to harassment and manipulation.

The issue had first come into public domain in 1997 when the Supreme Court in its full court meeting attended by 22 judges passed a resolution moved by then CJI Verma to make it mandatory for Supreme Court and high court judges to declare their assets to their respective chief justices.

There was no movement for nearly a decade on the issue. But the judiciary was pushed on the defensive following mounting allegations of corruption against top judges since 2007.

The resistance from within against the higher judiciary's firm stand that judges cannot be compared with others on issues like assets declaration, finally cracked the issue.

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