

## 'First step towards accountability of judges'

J. Venkatesan

*A tribute to the power of public opinion, says Prashant Bhushan*

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*Decision will strengthen litigants' confidence in supreme judiciary: Sorabjee*

*It is hoped High Court judges will emulate Supreme Court judges*

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New Delhi: The Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reform (CJAR) and senior lawyers have welcomed Supreme Court judges' decision to put their asset declarations on the court website.

(As all judges have not signed the resolution passed at Wednesday's Full Court meeting, it was not released on Thursday)

In a statement, advocate and CJAR convener Prashant Bhushan said: "It is a welcome first step towards transparency and accountability of judges in this country. It is also a tribute to the power of public opinion. We hope that this decision will encourage and spur the judges of the High Courts to do likewise. We also hope that it will put moral pressure on other public servants to similarly make their asset declarations publicly available, in accordance with the spirit of the Supreme Court judgment by which they ordered public declaration of assets of candidates contesting elections."

The statement said: "The public disclosure of assets by judges, though a welcome first step, is certainly not the end-all of the serious problem of judicial accountability or the lack of it. The main problem is the lack of an independent credible institution which could entertain complaints against judges, investigate them and take action against errant judges."

Attorney-General G.E. Vahanvati said, "I welcome it. There may be some problem as time goes by. Ultimately, the objective is to see that judges are protected from harassment."

The former Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee, said: "It is a salutary step and in the right direction. It is heartening that judges heeded the advice of the former Chief Justices of India [Justice J.S. Verma and Justice V.N Khare] and senior lawyers about the need for declaring and disclosing their assets. This decision will strengthen the confidence among litigants in the supreme judiciary and also put an end to the unsavoury criticism of the initial indecision among judges to declare the assets. I am sure the High Court judges will emulate the fine example set by the Supreme Court judges and declare their assets."

Senior advocate K.K. Venugopal said this decision would uphold the image of the higher judiciary. "I have no doubt that High Court judges will also follow the high tradition set by the judges of the Supreme Court."

Supreme Court Bar Association president M.N. Krishnamani said: "It is good that the Supreme Court judges have finally decided to disclose their assets. But this is inadequate. They have to disclose the assets of their children also, whether dependent or not, and this should be done on an annual basis."

**"Guard against harassment"**

All-India Bar Association vice-chairman S. Prabhakaran said: "This is a bold step which will augur well for strengthening the independence and maintaining the high image of the judiciary. Every effort must be made to ensure that in the name of disclosure, no harassment is caused to a judge. While High Court judges must also emulate this decision, politicians and bureaucrats should come forward to disclose their assets on an annual basis."

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/08/28/stories/2009082859841000.htm>