



Judges to discuss all but corruption, assets

A two-day conference of India's top judges beginning in New Delhi on Friday will discuss 21 important issues except corruption in the judiciary and judges' reluctance to declare their assets.

An 88-page agenda note for the conference to be attended by Chief Justice of India KG Balakrishnan, Supreme Court judges and chief justices of all 21 high courts does not include the issues affecting the judiciary's credibility.

"The conference to be held in the Supreme Court will devise ways and means to expedite disposal of cases and to streamline and improve the justice delivery system," said a release on the Supreme Court website.

This meeting will be followed by a conference of chief ministers and chief justices of high courts on Sunday. The agenda for this conference also skips any reference to the two sensitive issues.

The meetings come within a fortnight of the government being forced to drop a Bill proposing to keep judges' assets secret.

The absence of these issues at the conference has drawn sharp criticism from top jurists.

"It was an opportunity for the higher judiciary to respond to the criticism that it has been opposed to introduction of transparency measures. Issues like pendency, lack of funds etc, are being discussed since decades," said Justice PB Sawant, a former Supreme Court judge.

Noted jurist VR Krishna Iyer said the conference will be a waste of time and money. "Instead of winning back the public trust severely eroded by recent scandals involving some judges, the conference seems to be headed on a beaten track," he said.

The Law Ministry refused to comment on the issue. "It is for the judiciary to decide the agenda," said a ministry official, not willing to be named.

The last such meet was held in April 2008. The months that followed saw some of the worst corruption scandals in the history of country's judiciary.

In June last year, 36 judges, including 11 high court judges and a Supreme Court judge were named as alleged beneficiaries in the multi-crore rupee Ghaziabad provident fund scam. The CBI is still probing the scam.

Two months after this, the Ghaziabad scam, in August last year, a cash-at-judge's-door scandal rocked the Punjab and Haryana high court.

A lady judge informed the police that Rs 15 lakh (1.5 million) was delivered at her residence by a clerk of a Haryana government law officer. Police inquiries later revealed that the cash was meant for another lady judge of the same court, Justice Nirmal Yadav. The CBI is still probing this case too.

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