

# New Bill to bring judges' assets under RTI

**Maneesh Chhibber** Posted online: Thursday , Oct 08, 2009 at 0848 hrs

**New Delhi** : Ending all speculation over the fate of the Judges (Declaration of Assets and Liabilities) Bill, 2009, the Union Ministry of Law and Justice on Wednesday said it would introduce a new Judges (Inquiry) Bill in the coming Session of Parliament. This Bill would also have a clause making it mandatory for judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts to declare their assets on a regular basis to their respective Chief Justices.

But, more importantly, Union Home Secretary G K Pillai, who is also the Justice Secretary, on Wednesday told the newly-reconstituted Department-related Parliament Committee on Law and Personnel that the citizens of the country would be able to access details of assets of the judges under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

As first reported by The Indian Express, having lost face in its failed attempt to introduce the Judges (Declaration of Assets and Liabilities) Bill, which was aimed at preventing any attempt by anybody, including any court or public authority, to access details of assets filed by the judges, the Law Ministry decided to shelve its plan to bring in a standalone legislation on the matter of judges' assets.

"We have decided to subsume the Judges (Declaration of Assets and Liabilities) Bill, 2009, in the Judges (Inquiry) Bill, minus the clause relating to confidentiality of the assets," Pillai told members of the Parliamentary panel, which was meeting for the first time since its re-constitution under a new chairperson, Congress leader Jayanthi Natarajan. Pillai also detailed steps taken by the government to make justice accessible to the common man.

Apart from Pillai and other senior officers of the Justice Ministry, Union Ministry of Law was also represented at the meeting by Law Secretary T K Vishwanathan and others.

It is learnt that the some MPs raised the issue of growing instances of corruption in the higher judiciary. Some member questioned the present system of appointment of judges of High Courts and Supreme Court by the collegium of judges, with one MP saying the same needed to be reviewed. Sources present at the meeting said an MP

was critical of the policy to allow kin of High Court and Supreme Court judges to practice in the same courts. Some MPs also underlined the need to bring in a fresh transfer policy for judges.