

**Satya Prakash, Hindustan Times**  
Email Author  
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## Can't make the assets of judges public: CJI

Amidst growing demands from various quarters of the society for declaration of assets by judges, Chief Justice of India KG Balakrishnan on Wednesday said that they have already done it. However, he refused to make the details public.

"All the judges of the Supreme Court have declared their assets. It is with me...all the judges— right from the Civil Judge Junior Division) to the Supreme Court, declare their assets," the CJI said in his address at the 21st KN Katju Memorial Lecture.

The subordinate court judges were bound by rules to declare their assets while the judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court were doing it voluntarily, Justice Balakrishnan said at the function attended by Union Minister for Science and Technology Kapil Sibal, former CJIs M N Venkatachalliah, J S Verma, former Law Ministers Ram Jethmalani and Shanti Bhushan, noted jurist Soli Sorabjee, among several other judges and lawyers.

However, after the function, when *HT* asked him if he was ready to make public the declaration of assets made by judges to him, the CJI replied in the negative. "No...no...no," he said.

The CJI also defended the activist role of the judiciary saying judges cannot shirk their responsibility if people go to courts for enforcement of their rights after being ignored by those who were supposed to solve their problems. He gave the example of the intervention of courts in making the mid-day meal scheme a success.

Earlier, in his address, Jethmalani had emphatically declared: "Supreme Court judges must set an example by declaring their assets...Nobody should have the slightest of reason to suspect them..." Referring to recent articles on the issue of declaration of assets by judges, he asked if government servants could do it why couldn't judges.

A few days back, former CJIs Verma and VN Khare had also supported demands for declaration of assets by judges. In a response to an RTI query on judges submitting details of their assets to respective Chief Justices, the Supreme Court had replied that "the information relating to declaration of assets by hon'ble judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts is not held by or under the control of registry of the court and therefore, cannot be furnished under the RTI Act".

The reply runs contrary to the court's 1997 resolution, which was adopted in a full meeting attended by 22 judges. "Every judge of the Supreme Court and High Courts would declare all the assets owned by him/her and the family, within a reasonable period of assuming office", the resolution said.

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