

CBI can question 2 Punjab & Haryana HC judges: CJI

CHANDIGARH: After recommending impeachment of Calcutta high court judge Soumitra Sen, Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan dropped another bombshell on Tuesday by allowing CBI to question two judges of the Punjab and Haryana HC. The two judges have been linked to what has now come to be known as the "cash-in-the-bag" scandal.

The scandal erupted when a packet containing Rs 15 lakh in cash sent by the now-arrested Haryana additional advocate general Sanjeev Bansal landed on August 13 at the door of justice Nirmaljit Kaur.

The judge said she didn't know why Bansal's clerk, Parkash Ram, brought the packet to her house. Things got murky when it was revealed that the money could have been meant for another woman judge with the same first name, Nirmal Yadav.

The CJI's go-ahead to CBI to "question" the two judges came promptly on a request made a few days back. Sources said CBI had petitioned Justice Balakrishnan after it felt "tied down and frustrated" in the absence of a direct version from the two judges in question.

The case went to the CBI on August 26, the same day that a three-judge panel was constituted by the CJI to look into the scandal that had tongues wagging about judicial corruption. The panel has complete liberty to probe the case.

Sources said the CBI had expected the nod to come last week but because the CJI had already formed the panel, following a detailed report by Punjab and Haryana high court chief justice Tirath Singh Thakur, the agency had remained apprehensive about the green signal.

One of the key players in the whole episode is absconding Delhi businessman Ravinder Singh. The hotelier, said to be close to judges across many Indian states, allegedly has a well-oiled network in the higher judiciary and has been on the run since Bansal in a statement to the police said that it was Singh who had asked him to deliver the money to one of the judges.

TIMELINE:

August 13: Rs 15 lakh delivered at justice Nirmaljit Kaur's residence by additional Haryana advocate general Sanjeev Bansal's clerk; Kaur lodges police complaint.

August 14: Amazingly, another Rs 15 lakh allegedly delivered at Justice Nirmal Yadav's residence by property dealer Rajiv Gupta.

August 14: A Solan land sale shows property purchased by Yadav, her brother Haryana

Minister Ajay Yadav, daughter and standing counsel of Haryana in New Delhi Suruchi, hotelier Ravinder Singh and others.

August 16: Chandigarh Police registers FIR under Prevention of Corruption Act; Bansal's clerk Parkash Ram arrested.

August 18: Bansal resigns from post; surrenders two days later.

August 21: Another accused, Panchkula businessman Rajiv Gupta surrenders to police.

August 22: Justice Yadav proceeds on leave; UT Police raids Bansal's and Gupta's residences in Panchkula.

August 23: *TOI* story exposes fake addresses used in Solan land deal; a day later Himachal government orders enquiry in the deal.

August 26: CJI KG Balakrishnan forms three-judge panel; probe goes to CBI.

September 9: CJI allows CBI to grill the two HC judges.