

**Nagendar Sharma, Hindustan Times**  
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## Jurists frown at CJI's refusal to reveal details of judges

Top jurists on Thursday slammed Chief Justice of India KG Balakrishnan for "trying to undermine the importance of transparency in the judiciary" by refusing to make public details of assets of Supreme Court and high court judges. They said the CJI's views "could raise doubts in the minds of people".

Justice Balakrishnan on Wednesday said that though all the Supreme Court judges had submitted their asset details to him, these would not be made public. This drew sharp reactions from former CJIs JS Verma and PN Bhagwati.

Legal luminary and retired Supreme Court judge VR Krishna Iyer said it was time to define declaration of wealth correctly. "In my view, the comments of the CJI on judges' wealth are completely wrong. What do the judges have to hide that they are afraid of their assets being made public? Any private aspect in the life of a judge, which affects public functioning, must be placed before the country," he said from Kochi.

Justice Iyer said the judiciary was only allowing suspicion and speculation by such acts of secrecy.

"In a democracy, for a judge to keep secret the details of his wealth runs contrary to the spirit of the Constitution," he said. "Such attempts would only undermine the importance of transparency in judiciary and raise doubts in the minds of the people."

Former CJI Verma, during whose tenure a resolution for declaration of assets by judges was made compulsory in a meeting attended by 22 Supreme Court judges in 1997, said the judiciary could not apply a different yardstick for itself.

"How can the judiciary explain its decision of having made it compulsory for candidates contesting elections to declare their assets, by not doing so itself? All information related to judges' appointment, declaration of wealth and any disciplinary action initiated against a judge should be made public," Justice Verma said.

Former CJI Bhagwati said he saw no reason why the judges' assets should not be made public, as the world already knew who owns what.

"In order to inspire confidence in the people towards the institution of judiciary, I see no problem in declaring the details of my wealth. If I were in the position where my decision mattered, I'd have happily made public the details," he said.

The CJI's assertion that SC and HC judges submit their wealth details voluntarily, contradicts a decade-old resolution of the apex court, which made it compulsory for the judges to declare their assets, documents show.

The Supreme Court, in a full court meeting attended by 22 judges, six of whom later went on to become CJIs, adopted a resolution, which stated: "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."

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