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## MEDIA OVERREACH?

### ‘Sting ops on trial court tarnished judiciary’s image’

#### SC Asks Scribes To Apologise

##### TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday blamed journalists for bringing the entire judiciary to disrepute by doing a sting operation in 2004 in a Gujarat trial court, which on their fictitious complaint issued arrest warrants against the President and the Chief Justice of India.

Brushing aside their plea that it was done in good faith to highlight the malady in the subordinate judiciary, a Bench of Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan and Justices R V Raveendran and Dalveer Bhandari said a rare mistake was blown out of proportion to tarnish the image of the entire system.

The CBI, which probed the incident, gave a clean chit to the magistrate but chargesheeted three lawyers accusing them of getting a false complaint filed before the judge and convincing him to issue bailable warrants, said additional solicitor-general Amarendra Saran.

An angry CJI asked: “Why should the magistrate suffer for two years as he was put under suspension after the sting operation, which painted the entire system as corrupt? What is the public good the journalists have done?”

The CJI’s views were shared by Justice Bhandari, who felt that the entire country believed that such corrupt practices were going on in the trial courts. Senior advocate Arun Jaitley said the journalists acted in good faith by not airing the sting straightaway. They came to the apex court, apprised it of the incident and only after the bailable arrest warrants were stayed that the channel telecast the incident.

The SC, on the basis of the writ petition by the journalists, had realised the gravity of the situation and sought suggestions from the solicitor-general to streamline the complaint filing procedure, he said.

Jaitley wondered whether the journalists who paid bribes to MPs (cash-for-query) and to bureaucrats (defence deals) be prosecuted for the sting operations to expose the corruption in the system.

He said the sensationalisation of the sting operation by involving the names of the

President and CJI was to draw everyone's attention to the malady. It then asked the Bar Council of India (BCI) whether it had taken any action against the lawyers who have been chargesheeted in the incident.

The court asked the BCI to file an affidavit on the issue and directed the journalists to submit further affidavits tendering unconditional apology for filing false complaints on oath for the sting operation.