

## PF scam: SC looks to probe judges but avoid scandal

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NEW DELHI: Faced with accusations having the potential to unhinge the traditional public perception of the judiciary's clean image, the SC on Monday decided to examine the possible mode of probe into the Rs 23 crore illegal PF withdrawal scam allegedly involving 23 judges, including some from the HCs and one from the apex court.

The difficult question on the mode of probe was posed by a petitioner, who is the chairman of Advocates Welfare Trust and Bar Association of Ghaziabad — the place where the scam took place — even as CJI K G Balakrishnan had shown faith in the integrity of the judges by asking the UP police, which is probing the scam, to send questionnaires to the judges, whose names allegedly figured in the scam.

Unwilling to have the judges interrogated by the police at first go, SC had written to the UP police that if the response of those judges to the questionnaire did not satisfy the probe team, then it could send request for personal interrogation.

The request for interrogation in person would be considered on merit, the SC had told the police in a communication. Appearing for the Bar, senior advocate Fali S Nariman flanked by senior advocates Anil Divan and M N Krishnamani expressed concern over the scandal and also pointed out the possible dent in the image of the judiciary if an SHO was seen interrogating a judge.

Bench comprising CJI Balakrishnan and Justices P Sathasivam and J M Panchal appeared undecided about the constitution of a committee as suggested by Nariman, it decided to seek the assistance of solicitor general G E Vahanvati to chart out a possible course to deal with the situation.

To keep the proceedings off the media glare, the bench decided to take up the matter in chamber on July 14, when Vahanvati and other senior advocates would make good their assistance to look for a way out of the problematic situation.

The petition said one Ashutosh Asthana, the Central Nazir in the judgeship of Ghaziabad, had allegedly confessed before a magistrate about his role in the PF scam and had allegedly mentioned the names of 23 judges who were beneficiaries of the ill-gotten money.

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