

Bill on judges' assets to keep info confidential

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NEW DELHI: The bill drafted by the law ministry for disclosure of assets by judges has little to do with judicial accountability.

On the contrary, it seeks to keep the information confidential and anybody who leaks it would be subject to prosecution and liable to imprisonment up to three years.

This is what a TV channel reported on Tuesday on the Bill that law minister Veerappa Moily had promised to introduce in the current session of Parliament as the beginning of a series of judicial reforms.

Prashant Bhushan of the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Judicial Reforms (CJAR) told TOI, "This is not a Bill for disclosure of assets but one for preventing disclosure of assets by making it a penal offence."

All that the Bill reportedly does is to provide a statutory basis to the 1997 resolution adopted by all the Supreme Court judges to disclose their assets to the CJI from time to time. The Bill accordingly stipulates that the high court and Supreme Court judges should file declarations of their assets to their respective chief justices. The hitch is, that it proceeds to say that the declarations would be kept confidential and anybody who leaks them would be prosecuted and punished with imprisonment up to three years.

This means that the declarations of assets by judges would be outside the ambit of RTI. The Bill is thus in tune with the reservations expressed by CJI K G Balakrishnan to the idea of making those declarations public.
