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Govt probing assets owned by ex-CJI Sabharwal's family

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NEW DELHI: Months after eminent citizens levelled allegations of misuse of public office against former Chief Justice of India Y K Sabharwal, the government has admitted that it is investigating the judge's family.

In reply to an RTI application, the Centre said the CBI was investigating the Noida plot allotted in the name of Sabharwal's daughter-in-law Sheeba while the income tax department was inquiring into a south Delhi property purchased by sons Nitin and Chetan.

The investigations have been undertaken in response to a complaint sent to the CBI in November 2007 by the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Judicial Reforms which includes as its patrons Justice V R Krishna Iyer, Justice H Suresh and former law minister Shanti Bhushan.

The organisation had, on the basis of documents gathered from various government departments, alleged that even as Sabharwal presided over the controversial orders of sealing of commercial properties in Delhi's residential areas, his sons were involved in the business of establishing malls and commercial complexes. In effect, it meant that Sabharwal's family benefited from the former CJI's orders on sealing.

In response to an RTI application seeking details of the CBI's probe, CPIO G Verma said the information sought relates to the "plot allotted by Noida to Sheeba Sabharwal, daughter-in-law of Y K Sabharwal, former CJI, which is being looked into by CBI's anti-corruption unit..." while the matter relating to "purchase of B-9, Maharani Bagh property by Chetan and Nitin Sabharwal, sons of Y K Sabharwal, and investments made by them in M/s Pawan Impex (P) Ltd" was being looked into by the income tax department.

It was alleged by the Campaign that purchase of the Maharani Bagh property for a consideration of Rs 15.43 crore could not be explained prima facie by Sabharwal or his sons' legitimate sources of income.

CPIO Verma, however, refused to disclose file notings of the investigation on the plea that under section 8 of the RTI Act, information that had no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual should not be disclosed. Such "personal information" can only be given if the appellate authority is satisfied that the larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information.

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