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CBI notices to 10 ministers, bureaucrats in hawala case

NEW DELHI. SEPT 26: At least 10 Union Ministers, the presidents of two leading Opposition parties and a number of bureaucrats and politicians have been served with show cause notices in the hawala case creating a flutter in the Government and political circles.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has asked them to declare their assets, bank accounts, details of their foreign visits and other such confidential information.

This is for the first time in the CBI's history that it has served show-cause notices on Union Ministers and powerful personalities for an economic offence which was earlier dismissed as "insignificant" by many.

The CBI is directly under the charge of the Prime Minister.

So enraged were some of the Ministers that they reportedly summoned the Director of the CBI, Mr. K. Vijaya Rama Rao, soon after receiving the papers and threatened to resign.

They wanted the CBI chief to explain whether he had sought the permission of the Prime Minister before questioning their integrity.

The investigating agency after de-coding the diary entries following the cross-examination of the Jains had served notices on the then Minister of State for Internal Security, Mr Rajesh Pilot, on the one hand and the Union Home Secretary, Mr K Padmanbhiah, on the other.

The Prime Minister's confidant, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr V.C. Shukla, also received a notice. So did the human Resources Development Minister, Mr Madhav Rao Scindia.

As per the Jains' explanations of the diary notations, the External Affairs Minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, has Rs 10 lakhs, the Union Agriculture Minister, Dr Balram Jakhar, Rs 61 lakhs, the Railway Minister, Mr C.K. Jaffer Sharief, Rs 10 lakhs, the Textiles Minister, Mr Kamal Nath, Rs 10 lakhs, the Minister of State for Civil Supplies, Mrs Krishna Sahi, Rs. 2 lakhs, her senior minister, Mr Buta Singh, Rs 7.50 lakhs and the UP Governor, Mr Motil Lal Vora, Rs 10 lakhs.

The issuing of the notices has created ripples and some of the ministers are keen to work out a common strategy to deal with the problem.

When contacted the official spokesman of the CBI confirmed that a “questionnaire” was indeed sent to those whose names appear in the seized diaries as part of the investigations being supervised by the Supreme Court. The spokesman would not say anything further on the subject since the hearings by the apex court are being held in camera.

The CBI issued the notices a few weeks ago as any further delay on the part of the agency could have invited the wrath of the Supreme Court bench, which is monitoring the investigations.

In fact it was only during the last hearing that the Supreme Court hanged its condemnatory tone towards the agency and the bench for the first time praised the CBI director for investigating the case “properly”.

According to highly placed sources, the CBI had a tough time in selecting the names of the persons to be served with the show-cause notices as there are 115 recipients of the hawala money. While some of them received hardly a few thousand rupees from the Jain brothers, there were many who were in the plus Rs ten lakhs category.

Interestingly, even as the CBI was serving notices on the Union Ministers and others, the Prime Minister inducted Mr R.K. Dhawan as Minister of State with independent charge in the Urban Affairs and Employment, though according to the de-coding Rs. 50 lakhs is listed against his name in the Jain diary.

What shocked the VIPs who have been served with questionnaire is that the CBI had dared to ask the details of the assets acquired by them since 1987, photocopies of their Income Tax returns '87 onwards, numbers of their bank accounts and records relating to these accounts, foreign visits undertaken by them, foreign exchange withdrawn and places of stay abroad and the amount spent or hospitality received.

The CBI also asked them to furnish the names and addresses of their friends and associates and dependents to enable the agency to follow up the investigations further.

All these VIPs were sent the show-cause notices in a sealed cover and politely told to reply to each point mentioned.

Sources in the CBI would neither confirm nor deny whether these VIPs had replied to the “questionnaire” or whether a time-limit had been set. But one thing is certain – it has not been able to decide whether to issue a similar questionnaire to the family members of those, who have died during the past five years.

Among those who figured in the diary and are not alive include Mr Rajiv Gandhi, Mr Chimanbhai Patel and Mr Kalyan Singh Kalvi.