

## Supreme Court reserves order on Telgi aide bail plea

The Supreme Court Thursday reserved its judgement on the bail plea of a key accomplice of Abdul Karim Telgi, the mastermind behind the multibillion rupee racket in printing and selling fake stamp papers, after his lawyer argued that his client had merely a 'peripheral' role in the scandal.

A bench headed by Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan reserved the verdict on the bail plea of Telgi's accomplice Manoj Ramesh Mehta after hearing arguments from Maharashtra government counsel Sushil Kumar and Mehta's counsel Shekhar Naphade.

The other judges on the bench included Justice R.V. Raveendran and Justice M.K. Sharma.

Pleading for the grant of bail to Mehta, Naphade argued that his client merely had 'a peripheral role' in the scam. Yet he had been languishing in the jail for over four and half years despite the fact that the crime that he is alleged to have committed does not entail a jail term longer than five or six years, he contended.

Pointing out that trial of his client was yet to begin, Naphade said that there were over 70 witness to be examined by the court, the completion of the trial was set to take long and it would not be 'in the interest of justice to keep him incarcerated' since then.

But strongly opposing Mehta's bail plea, Maharashtra government counsel Sushil Kumar contended that the accused was a key conduit of Telgi, and worked for him in money-laundering his ill gotten wealth.

He said that he used to receive cash from Telgi and hand him over bank drafts after depositing the money in his account, said Kumar, adding he used to turn Telgi ill-gotten black money into white.

Kumar also pointed out to the court that his crucial role in the scam was also evident from the fact that investigative agencies had recovered fake stamp papers worth Rs 8.27 billion from a storage belonging to Mehta in Bhiwandi.

Kumar also contended that Mehta is facing trial under section 3 of the state's stringent law against organised crime - the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, the punishment for which is up to life term in prison.

He said the scam kingpin Telgi has already confessed his guilt in the case. Telgi, along with 42 others, have already been convicted for their varying roles in the huge scandal that was busted in 2002 . Telgi is presently serving a 15-year-jail term. He was also fined a whopping Rs 2.57 billion for his role in the crime.

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