

Apex court suspends Badal's trial till July-end

The Supreme Court Wednesday ordered suspension till July-end of the ongoing trial of Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal and his two relatives in a Mohali court for alleged corruption.

A bench of Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan ordered the suspension on a plea by Badal's predecessor Capt. Amarinder Singh seeking transfer of the trial outside the state.

Former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has sought transfer of the trial contending that subsequent to the change of regime in the state most of the prosecution witnesses, who are mostly government officials, have turned hostile, jeopardizing a free and fair trial in the state.

While ordering suspension of the trials of Badal, his wife Surinder Kaur and son Sukhbir Badal, the bench, which also included Justice R.V. Raveendran and Justice M.K. Sharma, said it would have an elaborate hearing July 24 on Capt Singh's plea for transfer of the trial outside the state.

As Capt Singh's plea came up for the hearing, the bench, however, did not accede to his request to completely stay the trial of Badal and his relatives by Punjab courts at Ropar and Mohali.

The Punjab chief minister and his family members are facing trial for owning properties worth several millions far exceeding their legal income. They are facing trials in lower courts at Mohali near Chandigarh and at Ropar in Punjab.

The case against Badal and his family members was registered in 2003.

The petition seeking transfer of trial of the Punjab chief minister and his family members outside Punjab was filed jointly by Captain Singh and several other Congress legislator of the state, including Sukhpal Singh Khaira, Jeet Mohinder Singh, Mangat Ram Bansal and Gurpreet Singh Khangar.

The petitioners have contended that since Badal became the Chief Minister of the state February 28, 2007, most of the prosecution witnesses, who are mostly government officials, have turned hostile, jeopardizing a free and fair trial in the state.

They have also contended that Badal has replaced the whole old team of public prosecutor and state counsel to conduct the trial of the case.

They have alleged that the courts have examined only 58 out of the 138 witnesses till now, but the prosecution was now seeking examination of the investigative officer of the case on the ground that almost all the crucial witnesses have been examined.

Senior counsel K.K. Venugopal appearing for Badal, however, had contended that the petition was politically motivated and the petitioner had no right to approach the court to seek the transfer of trial.

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