

'Government must have policy on commuting death sentence'

The chief investigator of the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, D.R. Karthikeyan, has asked for a 'uniform policy' on commuting death sentences.

Speaking to IANS on the sidelines of a business meet here, Karthikeyan, the former director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) who was responsible for securing convictions for the killers of Gandhi, said, 'There should be a government policy on clemency for death row convicts.'

'This policy should be uniform for all death row convicts and clemency reasons should not differ from case to case,' said Karthikeyan.

Gandhi was assassinated May 21, 1991, at Sriperimbudur, near Chennai, by a Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Eelam suicide bomber.

The case was investigated by the CBI and 26 people were convicted, of which four were given death penalty.

The sentence of one of the accused, Nalini, was later commuted to life. She has appealed to the government to be set free after having spent 17 years in jail.

Asked if he felt disappointed by the turn of events in the case, Karthikeyan said he had 'no views' on Nalini's release, except that 'the courts had upheld Nalini's role in the assassination'.

'Investigations and convictions in the Rajiv (Gandhi) assassination case are over. The courts found the convicts guilty, that is why death sentence was awarded,' the chief investigator said.

He, however, went on to say that for all cases where death sentences had been awarded, the government 'must have a policy on commuting and clemency'.

'Death sentences are given on rarest of rare cases. Clemency pleas should be considered on an uniform manner. It should not differ from cases to case,' he said.

Nalini has a teenaged daughter and her husband, Sriharan alias Murugan, has also been sentenced to death in the same case.

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