

On 3rd May 2021, the Central Bureau of Investigation registered a case to probe into the roles of the senior Kerala police officials, whose names arose in the Committee report led by Justice D.K. Jain for allegedly framing space scientist Nambi Narayanan in the Indian Space Research Organization espionage case of 1994. The police officials named in the report have also been named as accused persons in the FIR. However, the Supreme Court has directed to not disclose the particulars.

• **FACTS OF THE CASE WITH TIMELINE.**

October 1994 – Two Maldivian nationals, Mariam Rashida and Fausiya Hasan were arrested in Thiruvananthapuram for reportedly obtaining confidential drawings of rocket engines of ISRO to sell them to Pakistan.

November 1994 –The Director of the cryogenic project of ISRO, Nambi Narayanan, was arrested along with four other people.

January 1995 – All scientists were released on bail.

April 1996 – The Central Bureau of Investigation declares to the Kerala High Court that the espionage case is false and that no evidence was found to support the charges.

May 1996 – The High Court of Kerala discharges all accused persons.

May 1998 – The Supreme Court informs the Kerala government to award compensation of Rs. 1 lakh to Mr. Narayanan and the other scientists.

April 1999 – Nambi Narayanan claims compensation by approaching the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for the mental agony and torture that he was subjected to.

May 2001 – NHRC awards him Rs. 10 lakhs as interim compensation and directs the state to pay the damages. The government then further challenges the order.

September 2012 – The High Court directs the state to pay the compensation but the state fails to comply with it.

May 2018 – A three-judge bench consisting of Chief Justice Deepak Misra, Justice A. M. Khanwilkar and D. Y. Chandrachud is formed and they consider awarding Mr. Narayanan compensation of Rs. 75 lakh and to restore his reputation. The Supreme Court also stated that it is considering asking the Kerala government to reinvestigate the roles of SIT officers in the case as Mr. Narayanan had faced a dent in his reputation because of malafide prosecution and that the Kerala government cannot escape from the vicarious liability it has to grant him compensation.

July 2018 – The Supreme Court reserves verdict on the plea. The CBI informs that it is ready for a probe monitored by the Supreme Court to look into the allegations by Narayanan.

September 2018 – The Supreme Court awards Mr. Narayanan a compensation of Rs. 50 lakh for the mental cruelty subjected to him during the ISRO spy case.

April 2021 – The Supreme Court ordered that the report of a high-level committee regarding the role of the erring police officials be given to the CBI.

May 2021 – The CBI registers an FIR against Kerala police personnel.

- **WHY THE FIR?**

The Kerala police had registered the first case against a Maldivian national under the Foreigners Act. The second case was registered by them against two Maldivians and others under the Official secrets Act. Later, both the cases were handed over to a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of Kerala police. Apart from the foreign nationals, the SIT arrested four more persons from ISRO.

The Intelligence Bureau (IB) also played a contentious role in leading the Kerala police towards the espionage route and the latter meekly followed. The probe was then transferred to the CBI. After the CBI found the case to be false and the Supreme Court accepted its findings, in its report, the CBI alleged that Siby Mathew, who headed the SIT, did not take sufficient steps for thorough investigation of the accused persons and verifications of the alleged disclosures made by them. [“In fact, he left the entire investigation to IB surrendering his duties. He](#)

ordered indiscriminate arrest of the ISRO scientist and others without adequate evidence being on record...” said a CBI report addressed to the then State Chief Secretary, listing all alleged lapses. The CBI also submitted to the court that the investigation carried out by the Kerala police was full of lapses and also involved use of illegal means such as criminal torture.

And therefore, based on the committees report, the Supreme Court ordered the CBI to probe further into the matter. In furtherance to it, the CBI has filed an FIR against Kerala police personnel.

CONCLUSION

There will probably never be a real closure as there are too many loose ends to the case that rocked India in the mid-1990s. India suffered a huge setback on its rocket mission at the hands of Kerala police officials. Nambi Narayanan was accosted of his family, reputation, self respect and the work what he did for his country. Hence, it is essential that arbitrary use of power by police personnel should be put to an end.