

## **1994 espionage case - Nambi Narayanan - SC's Orders to CBI**

### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court has asked the CBI to probe the alleged framing of former ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan in an espionage case in 1994 and directed it to file a report in 3 months.

### **What has the Supreme Court said?**

- The Supreme Court has accepted the Justice DK Jain Committee report.
  - The committee was appointed by the top court in 2018.
  - It had submitted its report to the Supreme Court recently in a sealed cover.
  - It is said to have found "acts of omission and commission" by "responsible officials" in Kerala Government in the ISRO spying case.
  - The case was proved to be a false case.
- The SC has asked the Centre to hand over the report to the CBI for further probe.
- It has directed the CBI to treat the Jain Committee report as a preliminary inquiry report and proceed further.
- The Court also made it clear that the committee's report could not be made public and could not be shared with anyone, including former ISRO scientist S Nambi Narayanan.

### **What was the espionage case?**

- While working at ISRO, Narayanan was accused of selling vital secrets associated with Indian space technology to Pakistan.
- In October 1994, Kerala police in Thiruvananthapuram had registered a case against Mariam Rasheeda, a Maldivian national.
- Case was registered under Section 14 of the Foreigners Act 1946 and Section 7 of the Foreigners Order, 1948.
- The initial charges against her were of overstaying in India following the cancellation of her flight to Maldives.
- Following her interrogation, the police made out a case that she had contacted ISRO space scientists who were suspected of having transferred cryogenic engine technology to Pakistan through her.

- The following month, the police arrested Narayanan and another ISRO scientist, D. Sasikumaran.
- In 1996, the CBI submitted its closure report in the chief judicial magistrate's court in Kochi.
- It said that the allegations of espionage were unproven and false.
- The court admitted the closure report, leading to the discharge of all those who had been implicated.
- Narayanan was thus acquitted by a CBI court and the Supreme Court in 1998.
- However, he spent a total of 50 days in jail along with fellow scientist D Sasikumar and four others.
- **SC relief** - The case cost the 76-year-old former ISRO scientist his career and over two decades of his life and academic work.
- The Supreme Court awarded a compensation of Rs 50 lakh to Nambi Narayanan in 2018, saying he was "unnecessarily arrested and harassed" by the Kerala Police.

### **What is Narayanan's stance?**

- Narayanan considers the spy case as a conspiracy against him and the ISRO.
- He alleges the collective efforts of agents of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in connivance with Indian police and intelligence officers.
- The case was produced in order to stall India's rapid advancements in the development of an indigenous cryogenic rocket engine.

### **What was the cryogenic rocket engine issue?**

- Narayanan was working in-charge of the cryogenics division at ISRO.
- He foresaw the need for liquid fuelled engines for ISRO's future civilian space programmes.
- He thus introduced the technology in India as early as the 1970s, the same technology which later he was accused of selling.
- In 1992, ISRO finalised a deal with Russia for transfer of technology to develop cryogenic-based fuels.
- However, due to pressure from US and France on Russia, the deal was called off.
- Nonetheless, a new agreement with Russia was signed to fabricate four cryogenic engines without a formal transfer of technology.
- Tenders were floated and a consensus had already been reached with Kerala Hitech Industries Limited (Keltch) which would have provided the cheapest tender for fabricating engines.
- But, at the peak of his career, the scientist got stuck in the 'ISRO spy case'.

## What is the significance of the CBI probe?

- The Supreme Court's order tasking the CBI to look into the Justice D.K. Jain committee report is a much-needed step forward.
- The case was based on unfounded suspicion.
- The probe would thus go a long way in ensuring accountability for the suspected frame-up.
- It should be noted that the Kerala government has been resisting calls for disciplinary action against the erring police officers.
- It opposed the CBI's closure report and tried to revive the investigation by its own police.
- However, the effort was shot down by the Supreme Court.
- It is imperative now to ensure that there are no further impediments to the CBI in proceeding with its investigation.
- Also, the process of restorative justice should lead to its logical conclusion.

**Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express, Tribune India**

