



Chance at redemption

SC direction to CBI to investigate its former head is a vote of confidence. Agency must measure up to the task

By: [Editorial](#) |

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Three days after he assumed charge, CBI director Alok Kumar Verma has been asked by the Supreme Court to lead a criminal probe against the agency's former chief, Ranjit Sinha. Sinha has been accused of trying to influence the investigation into the coal scam. The apex court's directive is significant in more ways than one.

This will be the first instance where a CBI director will conduct a criminal probe against a former chief of the agency. The court has reposed its faith in "the impartiality of the CBI" to conduct "an investigation into the abuse of authority by Ranjit Sinha". Given that the CBI's impartiality has been questioned time and again, the apex court's directive is a vote of confidence of sorts. It is now up to the agency to measure up to the task.

The directive is also significant in view of the apex court's earlier strictures against the CBI in the coal scam. In 2013, the Supreme Court excoriated the agency as a "caged parrot" and "its master's voice".

The apex court had then noted that its 1995 directive to insulate probe agencies from political influences was regularly flouted. It had said "intrusions" by the-then law minister, Ashwani Kumar, officials of the PMO and coal ministry in the coal scam investigations had "shaken the entire process".

Even then, the court had indicated that it was not in favour of appointing an outside agency to monitor the CBI probe, observing that this would amount to tampering with the sanctity of the investigation. However, it had said that it was not averse to asking the Central Vigilance Commission to ensure that the CBI probe is fair and free from political interference.

This time, too, the apex court has asked the CBI director to take the “Chief Vigilance Commissioner into confidence in respect of the investigations.” But the court also asserted that the “change of guard” in the CBI is ground enough to repose its faith in the agency’s impartiality. Verma will be assisted by two officers of his agency.

The allegations against Sinha have further dented the none-too-good reputation of the CBI. In May 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that it was “completely inappropriate” for the agency’s ex-director to have met the accused in the coal scam without the presence of investigating officers.

It found him lacking in “ethical rectitude”. In its latest ruling on the case, the court has held Sinha prima-facie guilty, but said further investigation was required into the allegations against him. That the investigation has been assigned to the agency he once headed offers the CBI a chance to redeem itself, both in the eyes of the judiciary and the public at large.



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For A Big Bang: On its 68th Republic Day, what are the prospects for India’s rise?

TOI Editorials

As India enters its 68th year of existence today as a republic, the international environment has grown distinctly adverse to its rise. Among other things, India has a growing China problem. According to the IMF India’s growth slowed in 2016 to 6.6%, a full percentage point lower than in 2015. That loses India the tag of the world’s fastest growing major economy, with China ahead at 6.7%. This is portentous given that China has signalled in recent times that it wants to block India’s rise: it has been unrelenting in thwarting India at successive international fora.

Take for example its mocking dismissal, shorn of diplomatic finesse, of India’s aspiration to be a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group: according to Beijing such membership cannot be a “parting gift” to India from an outgoing Obama administration, when in fact India’s bid to enter NSG is premised on its impeccable non-proliferation credentials as well as consensus among NSG members bar China. While Republicans are now in power in the US and they have been traditionally

sympathetic to the case for assisting India's rise, Trump is an un-traditional Republican who fiercely avows protectionism and 'America first'.

It may be an encouraging sign that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the fifth world leader who President Trump chose to call. But New Delhi will have a problem if Trump follows through on his protectionist programme and cuts access to India's biggest export market. While New Delhi should continue to reach out across the world – the strategic partnership currently being pursued with the UAE is an excellent initiative in this regard – it will succeed in making its case only to the extent that it also succeeds in strengthening its own economy and fostering interdependency with others.

Chinese GDP may be five times India's and New Delhi may be a distant speck in Beijing's rear view mirror. But Beijing is an unsentimental practitioner of realpolitik; it will begin to respect India's concerns if it sees that speck in its rear view mirror grow larger rather than recede and vanish in the distance. To that end, India must grow its economy at a rate at least three percentage points higher than China's. This will need transcending populism and carrying out big bang reform, on a scale that hasn't been seen since 2004. The budget, due next week, will reveal whether big bang reform that improves India's and Indians' prospects is on the cards or not.

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