

J. BOBDE PANEL HEARS CJI ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT ALLEGATIONS

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Ranjan Gogoi

The Justice S.A. Bobde in-house inquiry committee heard Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi in an over two-hour session on Wednesday.

In the hearing, Chief Justice Gogoi refuted before the panel the allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by a court employee, sources said.

The committee, including Justice Indira Banerjee and Indu Malhotra, covered every fact, allegation and ground raised by the former staffer against the CJI.

The examination of the CJI, an unprecedented occasion, by the committee comes a day after the complainant “walked out” of the hearing on Tuesday. A letter of request was sent to the CJI and he had responded to it by meeting the committee, sources said.

She had refused to further participate in the “informal” proceedings after the panel allegedly refused her request to have a lawyer or a support person accompany her during the hearings. “I was compelled to walk out of the committee proceedings today (April 30) because the committee seemed not to appreciate the fact that this was not an ordinary complaint but a complaint of sexual harassment against a sitting CJI,” she said in a press release on April 30.

The committee had nevertheless decided to go ahead with its hearings without her. Sources said the committee would soon come out with a report, which would be placed before a Full Court and vetted by all the Supreme Court judges.

The crisis in the Supreme Court began when a clutch of websites published her allegations against the CJI on Easter day morning. Within an hour of the articles coming online on April 20, the CJI held an “extraordinary and unusual hearing” in the Supreme Court, during which he refuted that the allegations were part of a larger plot to make the judiciary a “scapegoat”.

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