

News

ED moves Calcutta High Court seeking CBI FIR against CM Mamata Banerjee after I-PAC raid dispute



TMC tied the search against IPAC to the poll process in West Bengal. However ED rejected the accusations that the search was linked to any elections.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a plea before the Calcutta High Court has sought a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who on Thursday stormed into the premises of political consultancy firm Indian Pac Consulting Private Limited (I-PAC) and the residence of its co-founder Pratik Jain where the ED was carrying out searches in connection with a money laundering case.

Justice Suvra Ghosh will hear the case at 2:30 PM along with a similar petition made by All India Trinamool Congress against "targeted" seizure of its party-related documents from the I-PAC-linked premises.

Banerjee is alleged to have taken various papers and electronic evidence from the IPAC-linked premises during Thursday's ED raid. She has alleged that it held information about her political party. According to sources, I-PAC has been working with the Trinamool Congress post-2019 Lok Sabha polls.

However, the ED said the searches were carried out as part of investigation in connection with a money laundering case launched in 2020 against businessman Anup Majee, who is facing charges of coal smuggling.

As per the ED, a coal smuggling syndicate led by Majee used to steal and illegally excavate coal from ECL leasehold areas of West Bengal and then sell it at different factories/plants in West Bengal. ED has alleged that a big part of this coal was sold to Shakambhari Group of companies.

The probe against Majee found links with Hawala operators as well, as per the ED. Among them, one hawala operator tied to layering of proceeds of crime of coal smuggling is alleged to have facilitated transactions of tens of crores of rupees to I-PAC.

While the premises linked to the I-PAC were being searched, different officers of Kolkata police are also stated to arrived there to verify the identity of the officials. However, the process turned dramatic with Banerjee's arrival.

In a statement made later, the ED said that Banerjee's actions caused obstruction in the ongoing investigation and proceedings under the PMLA. However, the TMC questioned the move ahead of the upcoming assembly polls in the State.

All three parties – Trinamool Congress, ED and Jain - have brought separate petitions before the Court. While ED plea accuses Banerjee of obstruction and seeks return of the claimed evidence, TMC has prayed against leaking of any party-related information by the central agency.

In its petition, ED has claimed that the sitting Chief Minister of the State of West Bengal, a constitutional functionary, has illegally interfered with and obstructed lawful search and

seizure proceedings conducted by its officers under the PMLA, 2002. "Such interference constitutes a direct assault on the independent powers of statutory investigating agency under the PMLA and subverts the rule of law," the plea says.

ED has also claimed that when the political executive uses State machinery to obstruct investigation, the rule of law stops to operate, warranting immediate interference by Constitutional Courts.

It has also claimed that its officers were wrongfully restrained and confined, and then physically prevented from exiting the premises and from performing statutory tasks.

Thus, it has prayed for a direction to the CBI for registration of a FIR to investigate the part of CM Banerjee, State police officers and other persons. ***"Hon'ble Chief Minister and State police themselves are perpetrators of wrongful confinement and obstruction of investigation, the only independent central agency viz. the CBI which is insulated from State control, can conduct a fair and serious investigation,"*** the plea contends