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UP cops want to question judges

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LUCKNOW

June 18: In an unprecedented move, the Ghaziabad police has sought the permission of the Chief Justice of India to "interrogate" over a dozen serving and retired judges of the Supreme Court and the high courts.

The police has sought similar permission from the Chief Justice of the Allahabad high court in connection with 25 serving and retired district judges. "We need to talk to these honourable judges in connection with the investigation, and the police has made a request to the CJI," additional DGP Brijlal told this newspaper on Wednesday.

These judges have been accused of siphoning funds from the general provident fund (GPF) of Ghaziabad district.

The scam came to light with the arrest of one Ashutosh Asthana, who was administrative officer of the Ghaziabad district court.

Asthana, now in jail, confessed to misap-

propriation amounting to Rs 7 crores from GPF accounts. According to sources, in his confession before a judicial magistrate, Asthana claimed he forged identity documents, created fictitious GPF accounts and withdrew large sums. The money was spent on buying consumer items for judges, he alleged. "Whatever withdrawal was made was done with the sanction of the district judge," he alleged.

District judges are the sanctioning authority for allowing money to be withdrawn from an employee's GPF account.

Ashutosh Asthana has named 36 judicial officers as recipients of the favours from the money thus withdrawn. He claimed he bought gifts, including LCD TVs, fridges, washing machines, furniture, jewellery, mobiles, and even gave cash in some cases.

A district vigilance officer detected the fraud in February this year. The police claims it has corroborating evidence in the form of bills for these gifts paid by Asthana.