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## SC imposes ₹1 fine on Bhushan for contempt

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NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday punished civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan with a "nominal" fine of ₹1 for committing criminal contempt by "scandalising the court".

"By showing magnanimity, instead of imposing any severe punishment, we are sentencing the contemnor with a nominal fine of ₹1," a three-judge Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra said.

Mr. Bhushan, in a press statement, said he reserved his right to file a review but would pay the fine to an institution he holds in high esteem.

The court said an "appropriate sentence" and not a mere warning was required as Mr. Bhushan had showed an "unjustifiable insistence" to not express regret.

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He showed no remorse for causing harm to an institution which he belongs to, the order said.

"Lawyers are supposed to be fearlessly independent and robust but at the same time respectful to the institution," Justice Mishra, who authored the 82-page sentencing verdict, observed.

Mr. Bhushan was convicted on August 14 in a suo motu contempt action for his tweet of a picture of the Chief Justice of India astride a high-end bike while the court was in "lockdown" and another about the functioning of the court in the past six years.

He followed this up by filing an over 100-page reply in his defence, criticising the court of "surrendering to a majoritarian executive acting in tyranny".

When asked to apologise, he issued two statements, in one of which he said he neither asked for the magnanimity or mercy of the court but would "cheerfully" submit to any punishment.

He had refused the advice of Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal to express regret and take this reply off the record.

"When the senior-most functionary in the legal profession of the stature of Attorney General was giving an advice to express regret and withdraw the wild allegations, a lawyer of such a long standing was expected to give due respect to it. Even our request made to him has gone in vain. Thus, we feel that the simple issuance of warning is not going to suffice in the instant case," Justice Mishra said.

The court ordered him to pay the fine by September 15, failing which he would, by default, undergo a simple imprisonment of three months and a ban from practising in the apex court for three years.

The court said it was up to the apex lawyers' body, Bar Council of India, to "suspend the enrolment" of a lawyer convicted of contempt, that is, "if it so desires".

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