

SC ASKS FOR TIMELINE ON APPOINTMENTS

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The Supreme Court on Wednesday questioned the government about the delay in clearing Collegium recommendations for judicial appointments to various High Courts. A Bench of Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Surya Kant asked the Centre whether there was a timeline for government clearance of such recommendations.

“If you don’t give comments for five months on Collegium recommendations, it is a matter of great concern,” Justice Kaul said.

The Bench noted how recommendations from the High Courts of Bombay and Allahabad date back to May or June last year. It said 189 proposals for judicial appointments were still pending. “What is your timeline to respond to these recommendations of judges appointment? The government has taken more than a year to respond... You say something is pending with Intelligence Bureau and some Chief Minister has not responded. We want to know your timeline,” the court addressed Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal.

The Bench served notice on High Courts which were not party to the petition filed by Lok Prahari, an NGO, seeking the appointment of additional judges in High Courts. “We expect the High Courts to express their views in the present matter. The High Courts that are not impleaded shall be impleaded as party respondents in the instant matter,” the apex court directed.

In February last year, the Supreme Court had conveyed its alarm at the rising number of judicial vacancies in various High Courts. Some of them were functioning only with half their sanctioned strength.

Mr. Venugopal, at the time, explained that the Collegium had also delayed the appointment process. The government’s delay was largely because it thoroughly combed through the antecedents of the candidate. The process, on an average, takes at least 127 days. On the other hand, the judiciary takes 119 days on an average merely to forward the file to the government, he said.

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