

The Tribune

Vacancies in judiciary a national challenge: CJI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) TS Thakur today said large vacancies of judges in the country was a national challenge and the Centre was being persuaded to take steps so that the whole process can be expedited.

The CJI, who is here on a three-day visit, refused to elaborate or comment on the issue of filling of vacancies of the judges, which has virtually brought the judiciary and the Central government on a path of collision in the recent past.

The CJI today inaugurated the hostel block of the Rs 163-crore HP Judicial Legal Academy at Ghandal, near here, and laid the foundation stone of the National Law University (NLU) to be constructed at a cost of Rs 136 crore.

Justice Thakur said some of the states like Himachal were lucky as against a sanctioned strength of 13 judges, there were only two vacancies. "In my home state of Jammu and Kashmir, against a sanctioned strength of 17, there are only eight judges, leading to a lot of problem," he remarked.

"The issue of huge pendency of cases, as studies have revealed, is directly linked to high literacy rate and affluence," he remarked. He added that this was quite evident from states like Kerala which with its high literacy and high awareness levels had a huge pendency. The CJI said in Himachal too the situation was more or less the same as the people here were conscious of their rights and were highly literate, leading to filing of more cases.

He said in the case of Himachal against a pendency of 59, 133 on November 27, 2013 the number has been reduced to almost half at 30, 509. "The Chief Justice of Himachal High Court needs to be complimented for bringing the pendency down to half, a situation which I wished existed in other high courts as well," he said. The subordinate judiciary in the state, he added, had disposed of 2.51 lakh cases in 2015.

He said since the number of judicial officers in Himachal was 135, he was of the firm opinion that spending such a huge amount of Rs 163 crore on a judicial academy would be justified only if these are fully utilized and quasi-judicial officers in the state government also undergo training here. "It will be criminal and unfair if these academies remain unutilized as the state government has provided funds by putting other pressing needs of the public pertaining to water, school and hospital on the backburner," he said.

On the request of Chief Minister Virbhadr Singh that the CJI should urge the Centre to provide Rs 100 crore to HP for the setting up of the Law University, the CJI said normally he did not intervene in such matters but considering the financial restraints faced by small states like HP will take up the matter with the Prime Minister. "Moreover, since Himachal is my wife's home state, I am bound to make this request to the PM," he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh said though there has been expansion of judiciary in HP the pendency of cases was a matter of grave concern. “The high court under Chief Justice Mansoor Ahmed Mir has done a commendable work in reducing pendency but speedy justice must be ensured to the people for which the state government will extend all possible help,” he said.

Chief Justice Mansoor Ahmad Mir said judicial education was essential for enhancing and improving the standards of justice. Moreover, independence of judiciary largely depends upon public confidence.

Law and Health Minister Kaul Singh Thakur and Justice Rajiv Sharma, president of the judicial academy also spoke on the occasion.

Nostalgic moment

- Going down memory lane, Chief Justice of India TS Thakur recalled his four-decade long association with the Queen of Hills. With his wife hailing from Himachal, the CJI is a frequent visitor to the place
- It was an emotional moment for Thakur, on his first visit to the state after his elevation as the CJI, as he shared his association with Shimla since the first time he visited the city in 1976. “It was way back in 1976 that I came here for the first time with my father DD Thakur. With my wife being from the state, I have had a close and warm association with the state and many people here,” he recalled while getting emotional. He was speaking at the felicitation programme organised by the HP High Court Bar Association.
- Incidentally, the CJI is staying at the Raj Bhawan, where his marriage had taken place way back in May 1969. His wife Amita Thakur studied here in the town and her father CS Panwar was Director, Information and Public Relations.
- Thakur said during his frequent visits to the town with his father, an eminent jurist, he would frequently visit the chambers of some prominent lawyers, including Justice Bhawani Singh, Justice LS Panta, Lt Inder Singh and Chabil Dass, from whom he got to learn a lot as a young lawyer.
- Thakur, who has been a very frequent visitor to the town said after his retirement he would be seen even more often than before. “I urge young lawyers to work with dedication and sincerity with concentration on their brief rather than pleasing judges,” he said. — (by Vijay Arora)

e-court fee system inaugurated

- Chief Justice of India Justice TS Thakur inaugurated the e-court fee system in the High Court on Friday.

- It is a web-based secure system of paying court fee to the government. The system-generated e-court fee receipt will replace the stamp paper, which will be secure and bar coded and unique number is auto-generated
- There is also a facility of locking of e-receipt by court officials, which prevents reuse of the e-court fee receipt
- The system also provides online verification of e-court fee receipt and also a feature to check as to whether such receipt has been locked or not by the court officials
- It is eco-friendly as it prevents paper use and also process-related fraudulent practices, being a secure and reliable collection mechanism. The system also prevents the leakage of government revenues
- A central data repository is built to facilitate easy verification and generation of reports
- The facility of payment of e-court fee is also available online