

## **Hindustan Times**

### **Filling vacancies in judiciary a national challenge, says CJI**

The Narendra Modi government is not responsible for the delay in appointments of judges, sources in the law ministry asserted on Friday, even as CJI TS Thakur described the number of judicial vacancies as a “national challenge.”

“We have several problems in matter of appointment of judges,” CJI Thakur said in Shimla. He said states like Himachal Pradesh and Kerala are fortunate because the number of vacancies there is low.

“Elsewhere the number of vacancies is so large that it has become a national challenge and we are making effort persuading the government to look into the matter and expedite appointments,” Justice Thakur added.

A top source in the law ministry said within days of the Supreme Court’s judgment of December 16, directing the government to improve the collegium system, it had written to the CJI saying it is not averse to the process of appointments being resumed if the collegium agrees.

Since January, the appointments of 52 high court judges, 110 additional judges and four judges of the Supreme Court have been made.

The government believes that the Supreme Court’s own judgement has given it enough teeth to revamp and improve the process through a new memorandum of procedure (MOP) – or guidelines for appointing judges.

“There is a judicial direction to us,” the top government source said, underlying the government’s intent to pursue judicial reforms.

The government believes that the constitution bench’s judgement “places an obligation” on it to introduce transparency into the system and widen the process of consultation for appointing judges.

The five-judge bench, headed by Justice JS Khehar, laid down the guiding factors for preparing a fresh MOP. These include eligibility criteria, transparency in the appointment process, setting up a secretariat and a mechanism for looking at complaints.