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Govt wants panel to probe corrupt judges

Nagendar Sharma
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THE GOVERNMENT on Thursday said it would not remain a silent spectator if the judiciary failed to take action against judges facing allegations of corruption and misconduct.

Ahead of Friday's hearing in the Supreme Court on the Ghaziabad provident fund scam allegedly involving 36 judges, the Law Ministry said judiciary's reluctance to take action against corrupt judges is tarnishing its image.

"Allegations of corruption against judges are on a steady rise. Ghaziabad scam is an example, where names of judges right from the district level to the Supreme Court have cropped up. There should have been a system to look into it, we cannot be silent spectators in such a serious matter", a senior ministry official said.

Faced with criticism for its reluctance to take steps to make the judiciary accountable, the government is likely to push for the passage of the Judges Inquiry Bill during the Monsoon session. The bill provides for a five-member panel of judges to probe allegations against the judiciary.

The ministry wants the judiciary to take an initiative and form a judges panel itself.

The demand for it gained momen-

tum after the Ghaziabad scam came to light in which 36 judges — a sitting Supreme Court judge, 11 judges of Allahabad and Uttarakhand High Courts, and 24 district-level judges of Uttar Pradesh — have been named as alleged financial beneficiaries.

Asked about the government's stand in the Ghaziabad case, in which the Supreme Court has sought its opinion on what sort of probe should be ordered, the official said: "The Law Min-

ister has always maintained that allegations against judges should be looked into by a committee of judges. He is against external interference, but the judiciary has been reluctant to take steps."

Law Minister H.R. Bhardwaj is learnt to have conveyed his views to Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan that there was an urgent need to constitute a permanent committee of judges to probe allegations of corruption and misconduct against the judges, sources said.

Presently, a probe against a Supreme Court or High Court judge can

only be ordered if 100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs move a motion for impeachment against the judge.

Though the CJI and High Court Chief Justices can initiate a probe against judges facing corruption and misconduct allegations by activating an in-house procedure, this mechanism has failed to deliver so far.

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