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Court fee breather for poor?

New Delhi: Parliament's Standing Committee on Law and Justice has said there should be differential fees for commercial and corporate cases and no fees for poor people.

The committee has also said the strength of Supreme Court judges should be increased from 25 to 30 to reduce pending cases and four benches of the apex court be opened, to begin with one in Chennai.

As for differential court fee, the standing committee said, corporate commercial bodies have huge financial resources at their disposal and invariably their disputes are worth crores of rupees. "Accordingly, it would be reasonable if they are required to pay the court fees as per the value of their dispute on ad-valorem basis which should extend from 1% to 5% of the total value of the dispute," the committee said.

A House panel said corporate and commercial bodies are cash-rich to settle disputes worth crores in courts and should be subject to differential fees as per the value of their dispute. The body has also recommended that the poor be relieved of the court fees

The committee pointed out various Acts that enable the companies to go directly to the Supreme Court. "The committee feels that a maximum fees of Rs 2,000 in terms of the 1996 SC rules is grossly inadequate and should, therefore, be revised accordingly," the committee said. The differential fee, it said, would result in higher income

for the Supreme Court which earns a little over Rs 1 crore from court fees.

The Standing Committee, in its report on 'The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2008', has recommended that the government should take up "every conceivable" measure to reduce pending cases in the apex court and other courts. Its report said the reason for bringing in the Bill was the pendency of cases in SC. According to official figures, there were 48,838 cases pending in the apex court till August 31, 2008.

On the issue of retirement age of HC judges, the committee has recommended that the "issue be given consideration and the age...be increased to 65 years. The committee feels that it will also facilitate the availability of experienced judges for elevation to the Supreme Court." TNN