

A supreme embarrassment

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In A fresh embarrassment to the judiciary, the top-level Supreme Court panel responsible for appointment of judges has declined to accept three of the eight names recommended by the Delhi High Court (HC) as judges.

HC Advocate Ashwini Kumar Mata, battling allegations of forgery and fraud, and two district court judges not been cleared for appointment as high court judges, reliable sources have told HT.

The judges panel (collegium) of Delhi High Court had recommended four lawyers and four district court judges the eight vacancies in the Delhi HC.

The latest development comes at a time when the judiciary is facing its worst-ever credibility crisis. There are growing demands to make the appointments process transparent and to ensure greater scrutiny of names being recommended for judges. Alongwith Mata, HC advocates N.K. Kaul, N. Waziri and Valmiki Mehta had also been recommended for appointment as judges. It later emerged following a complaint by senior Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan, that an investigation was pending against Mata on the allegations of forgery, fraud and cheating. Mata was allegedly involved in a property dispute in South Delhi, and the house owner had filed a police complaint against him.

While sources close to Mata say the police chargesheet "has exonerated him," court records show the case is pending and scheduled for hearing on January 29. Kaul, Mehta and Waziri are now set to be judges, alongwith A. K. Gupta, whose name was already with the Supreme Court panel.

The names of Supreme Court Registrar General V.K. Jain, Delhi High Court Registrar General Ajit Bharihoke, district court judges A.K. Pathak and I. Kochhar were also recommended by the high court panel.

While Jain and Bharihoke will now become high court judges, the names of Pathak and Kochhar have not been cleared for now.

It is learnt that the Supreme Court panel wants more details about the two judges before clearing them for promotion to the high court.