

Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms

Seminar on Accountability of Judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts

Tuesday, 27 October 2026

BACKGROUND NOTE

Introduction

The Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms is organising a keynote lecture followed by a panel discussion on “Accountability of Judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts” on the **27th of October 2026 at the India International Centre**, Multi purpose hall, Delhi. **Justice (Retd.) A.S. Oka, former Judge, Supreme Court of India, has kindly consented to deliver the keynote address. Eminent members of the bar, former judges and members of civil society will be part of the panel discussion that follows.**

Judicial accountability lies at the heart of a functioning democracy. The judiciary increasingly shapes governance and protects citizens’ rights, but the absence of transparent mechanisms to scrutinise judicial conduct undermines public trust and leaves complaints against judges without meaningful recourse. Strengthening accountability — through transparent appointments, asset disclosure, and accessible grievance redressal — is essential to preserving the independence and integrity of the courts.

CJAR was formed as a collective response from lawyers, people’s movements and public-interest groups to work towards making the judicial system more accountable, accessible, and sensitive to the poor. Its work centres on three broad objectives: reforming the process of judicial appointments and accountability, improving access to justice and reducing delays, and shifting judicial attitudes to be more responsive to the poor. In practice, this has translated into documenting complaints against individual judges, tracking landmark judgments, and campaigning for judges to declare their assets and for greater openness in appointments and transfers.

Judicial Accountability and Transparency

The case of Justice (Retd.) Yashwant Varma of the Allahabad High Court illustrates the serious gaps in the mechanisms for judicial accountability in India. Justice Varma [was indicted](#) on three charges of misconduct by the Inquiry Committee constituted by the Lok Sabha Speaker under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. Although the report was laid before the House, his resignation means that no further action is likely to be taken. This would be the fourth instance in which a judge found guilty of misconduct has escaped serious consequences because the impeachment process did not reach its logical conclusion.

Justice Varma’s case is particularly egregious because the public had a direct view of the cash found burning at his residence, while his explanation for its presence was considered inadequate. [Two separate inquiries](#) have reportedly found that he had a case to answer concerning the cash and the destruction of evidence. No action has, at present, been contemplated against him under criminal law either. This state of affairs risks deepening public disillusionment with the judiciary. Similarly, Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Yadav [faced no apparent action](#) for making hateful and unconstitutional remarks about minority communities in a public forum.

Transfers have sometimes been used informally to discipline High Court judges. Although transfers are not legally intended to be punitive, the public is not told the reasons for particular transfers, and the collegium does not distinguish between administrative and punitive transfers. This lack of clarity, coupled with the absence of a formal, transparent mechanism for receiving and acting upon complaints against High Court and Supreme Court judges, creates a significant accountability deficit.

Accountability in this context means accountability to the public and adherence to constitutional principles. The judiciary has “no influence over either the sword or the purse”; its institutional legitimacy therefore depends substantially on public confidence. When citizens are confident that judges act within constitutional bounds and that deviations will be addressed fairly and effectively, they are more likely to approach the courts with faith in the institution.

Key Issues Regarding Transparency in the Judiciary

As the Supreme Court has often observed, [sunlight is the best disinfectant](#). Transparency in judicial appointments, complaints against judges, allocation of cases to benches, judges' financial declarations, and the administration of justice is essential to maintaining public confidence.

1. Judicial Appointments

Since November 2024, the Supreme Court has only disclosed bare, unsigned statements announcing collegium decisions. These do not provide details of the deliberations or reasons for appointments, transfers or elevations. The names of members who attended the meeting, whether decisions were unanimous, and whether there were dissenting opinions are also not disclosed. Before November 2024, collegium resolutions [contained more information](#) about the deliberations, factors considered, members present and dissenting views.

In May 2025, the Supreme Court took the significant step of placing in the public domain proposals for judicial appointments approved by the collegium. The information included candidates' backgrounds, relationships with sitting or retired judges, and recommendations pending with the government. However, the database has not been updated regularly and does not disclose important information about cases in which the executive has segregated recommendations or withheld particular appointments or elevations.

2. Asset Disclosures

Public disclosure of judges' assets has long been a demand of the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms (CJAR). Before May 2025, no Supreme Court judge and only a small number of High Court judges publicly disclosed their assets. Following the Justice Varma incident, the Supreme Court's Full Court resolution of 1 April 2025 made publication of asset declarations on court websites mandatory. Implementation, however, remains uneven within the Supreme Court and across High Courts. [A recent study](#) found that fewer than 11% of High Court judges had made their assets public.

3. Complaints Mechanism

The Supreme Court does not publicly disclose information about complaints received against judges, the action taken on those complaints, or their outcomes. Information sought under the Right to Information Act has also reportedly been denied on the ground that judge-specific information on corruption complaints is not maintained. A transparent complaints mechanism, with appropriate safeguards for judicial independence and against frivolous complaints, is essential to credible accountability.

4. Live-streaming of Judicial Proceedings

Following the Supreme Court's decision to livestream Constitution Bench hearings, it was expected that livestreaming would progressively become the norm across courts in India. The Supreme Court [now appears to be reconsidering the scope of livestreaming](#). It has prohibited the re-sharing or uploading of extracts from livestreams without explicit permission and has restricted reporting of proceedings to recognised news outlets. These developments raise important questions about public access to court proceedings and the lawful downstream use of publicly available judicial content.

Questions for Consideration

1. How does the absence of effective accountability mechanisms affect judicial independence?
2. What mechanisms should the judiciary adopt to restore public confidence in its ability to address judicial misconduct?
3. What are the minimum disclosures that should accompany judicial appointments, transfers and elevations?
4. What standards should courts adopt for livestreaming proceedings while enabling lawful and responsible downstream use of publicly available recordings?