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Why cast aspersions on court, asks CJI Bobde

'It has become almost a cultural thing to brand people and malign their reputation'

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NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Wednesday said it had become "almost a cultural thing" to brand people while lashing out at articles hinting the possibility of "bias" on the part of members of an expert committee constituted by the Supreme Court to intercede between the protesting farmers and the government.

"They [committee members] are brilliant minds in the field of agriculture... Branding of people whom you do not want, this has become almost like a cultural thing. You malign people's reputation and then you say the court is interested in these people... I am sorry

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that this kind of opinions are appearing in the Press," he said. There was criticism in social media and articles in newspapers over the court's choice of members of the committee constituted on January 12.

The opinions published said the members had previously written in favour of the farm laws. Write-ups in-

dicated that the members may not be empathetic to the cause of the farmers, who have been protesting at the Delhi borders for nearly 50 days, for repeal of the laws. Amid this, one of the committee members, Bhupinder Singh Mann, recused himself from the committee.

"You unthinkingly cast aspersions on people. Bhupin-

der Singh Mann had even asked for modifications of the laws, can you say he is in favour of the laws... Or is it that you do not want people to have opinions? Even the best judges have opinions, though he can give a judgment against his own personal opinions... Have you not found in the body-politic people expressing an opinion and changing them once informed?" Chief Justice Bobde addressed some lawyers appearing for farmers.

'Bid to hear out farmers'
The court said the reputation of the members have been torn to shreds. The committee had been given no power to decide on the farm laws. They have been constituted only to hear out

the farmers.

"We formed the committee only to hear the farmers' grievances and submit a report to the court. They were given no adjudicatory powers. So, where is the question of bias here? If you don't want to appear before the committee, don't. But why cast aspersions on the court and brand people. We did not want to intervene, but we did only for the sake of the common people and the farmers," Chief Justice Bobde said. Newspaper reports do not decide disputes in court, he stated. "We are adjudicating the dispute. Are we going to read newspapers and decide disputes? Public opinions cannot be used to determine court proceedings," he observed.

Let police decide on parade, says CJI

The court said farmers should ensure that the citizens of Delhi were assured of "complete peace" on January 26.

The CJI called upon advocate Prashant Bhushan to advise his clients, several farmers' unions who have resolved not to come before the expert committee, to embrace peace. "We want a resolution of the dispute," he told Mr. Bhushan.

Mr. Bhushan responded, "Everybody wants it. But they are convinced that these laws need to be repealed. The laws were passed without prior notice or consultation. They were not placed for consideration

before any parliamentary committees. There was even no voting in the Rajya Sabha on them".

Chief Justice Bobde told Mr. Bhushan, "In a democracy, other than repeal, a way of striking down a law is through the court. The court is now seized of the issue".

Mr. Bhushan replied, "Protest is a way of putting pressure on government. If it stops, pressure wanes... Suppose My Lords come to a conclusion the laws are constitutional..."

There had been a call for peace among the protesting farmers' unions on Republic Day, he said.