CJI office to see six CJs in as many years

By Sanjay Sharma

With the Supreme Court attaining its full strength of 34 Judges, the office of the Chief Justice of India will see as many as six Chief Justices in as many years.

While Justice S A Bobde is all set to take over from Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi in November 2019, Justice NV Ramana will be CJI in April 2021 after the superannuation of Justice Bobde.

Similarly Justice U U Lalit would take over as CJI in August 2022 after Justice Ramana demits office on reaching the age of superannuation and Justice D Y Chandrachud would be CJI from November 2022 when Justice Lalit retires.

By the time Justice Chandrachud retires in November 2024, many judges present at the Apex Court would have retired but Justice Sanjeev Khanna’s elevation early this year, in January 2019, makes him in line to be CJI from November 11, 2024 till his retirement on May 13, 2025 - only about six months.

Justice Ranjan Gogoi

Justice Ranjan Gogoi, current Chief Justice of India is the 46th CJI whose term will come to an end on November 17, 2019, with Sharad Arvind Bobde in line to replace him. First person from Northeast India to become CJI, Justice Gogoi enrolled at the bar in 1978, and practised at the Gauhati High Court, where he was made a Permanent Judge on February 28, 2001. He was transferred to the Punjab and Haryana High Court on September 9, 2010, where he became Chief Justice on February 12, 2011. Later he was elevated as a Judge of the Supreme Court on April 23, 2012 and appointed as Chief Justice of India on October 3, 2018 after the superannuation of Justice Dipak Misra.
Justice S A Bobde
Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde presently, a Judge of the Supreme Court of India, enrolled as an advocate in September 1978 and practiced at the Nagpur Bench of Bombay High Court with appearances before the principal seat at Bombay and before the Supreme Court of India and became Senior Advocate in 1998. He was appointed as an Additional Judge of Bombay High Court in March 2000, made Chief Justice of Madhya Pradesh High Court in October 2012 and elevated as a Judge of the Supreme Court of India on April 12, 2013. Also serving as the Chancellor of Maharashtra National Law University, he is in line to be CJI w.e.f. November 19, 2019 after superannuation of Justice Ranjan Gogoi.

Father-son duo to head Supreme Court, script history
When Justice DY Chandrachud becomes CJI on November 9, 2022, he and his father Y V Chandrachud – who has been the longest-serving Chief Justice of India - will have scripted history as the only father-son duo to head the Supreme Court. Justice DY Chandrachud will retire on November 11, 2024.

Justice N V Ramana
Justice Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana, Judge in Supreme Court of India, enrolled as an Advocate on February 10, 1983, practiced in the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, Central and Andhra Pradesh Administrative Tribunals besides the Supreme Court of India. Previously, he has been the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court and the acting Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh High Court. Having specialized in Constitutional, Criminal, Service and Inter-State River laws, he is credited for authoring path-breaking judgments in tax, constitution, arbitration, and criminal law. With a tenure of eight years in the Apex Court, he is in line to be CJI w.e.f. April 24, 2021 after superannuation of Justice Bobde.

Time of appointment to Apex Court more crucial to be CJI
For becoming CJI, the date and time when the Judge was appointed to the Apex Court plays a crucial role rather than his age. In case two Judges are elevated to the Supreme Court on the same date, the one who takes oath first will be given priority even over the one who has put in more years of High Court service.

Justice U U Lalit
Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, Judge of the Supreme Court of India, prior to his elevation as a Judge, practised as a senior counsel at the Supreme Court. Sixth senior advocate ever to be directly elevated to the Supreme Court, Justice Lalit joined the bar in June 1983 and started practising in the Apex Court in 1986. From 1986 to 1992, Lalit worked with former Attorney General for India, Soli Sorabjee and was designated as a senior advocate of the Supreme Court on April 29, 2004. Appointed special public prosecutor for the CBI in the 2G spectrum cases, in 2011 by a Supreme Court bench, he is in line to be CJI in August 2022 after superannuation of Justice Ramana.
Justice D Y Chandrachud
Justice Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud, Judge of the Supreme Court of India, is a former Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court who obtained LL.B. degree from Delhi University in 1982, followed by an LL.M. degree from Harvard University in 1983. At Harvard, he studied on the prestigious Inlaks Scholarship, and received the Joseph H Beale prize. He went on to receive his Doctorate of Juridical Sciences (S.J.D.), from Harvard University in 1986. Known for having delivered a large number of landmark judgements, he has also been the voice of a strong dissent in notable cases including the Aadhaar case, he is in line to be CJI from November 2022 when Justice Lalit retires.

Justice Sanjeev Khanna’s elevation puts him in line to be CJI
Justice Sanjeev Khanna’s elevation early this year also puts him in line to be Chief Justice of India (CJI) from November 11, 2024. He is the nephew of Late Justice HR Khanna, who was the only rebel voice in the ADM Jabalpur case in 1976, in which he said fundamental rights cannot be curtailed during an Emergency.

Justice Sanjeev Khanna
Justice Sanjeev Khanna, Judge of the Supreme Court of India had earlier served as a Judge of the Delhi High Court from June 2005 to January 2019. During his tenure at the Delhi High Court, Justice Khanna authored or co-authored over 3,100 verdicts. Though known for his acumen in taxation law, he passed several public interest decisions. Enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council of Delhi in 1983, his practice of law included taxation, arbitration, commercial, environment & pollution and writ jurisdiction matters in the Delhi High Court besides matters of medical negligence under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. He is in line to be CJI from November 11, 2024 when Justice Chandrachud retires.

Justice B R Gavai will be second CJI from the SC community
After Justice Sanjeev Khanna demits the office of Chief Justice of India in May 2025 on his retirement, newly-appointed Justice B R Gavai will become the CJI for over six months. He will be the second Chief Justice of India from the Scheduled Caste community – the first being Justice (Retd) K G Balakrishnan.

Justice B R Gavai
Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, Judge of Supreme Court of India, who has also been a Judge of Bombay High Court, joined Bar in March 1985, worked till 1987 with late Raja S Bhonsale - former Advocate General and Judge of High Court. He practiced independently at Bombay High Court from 1987 to 1990 after which he practiced mainly before Nagpur Bench of Bombay High Court in Constitutional Law and Administrative Law. He was Assistant Government Pleader and Additional Public Prosecutor in the High Court of Judicature at Bombay, Nagpur Bench, from August 1992 to July 1993. Elevated as Additional Judge of the High Court in November 2003, he would be in line to be CJI May 2025 after the retirement of Justice Sanjeev Khanna.