

Justice Gavai nominated as SC Legal Services Committee Chairman

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What's in today's article?

- Why in news?
- Need for legal services
- What is Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC)?
- What is Legal Services Authorities Act?

Why in news?

- Supreme Court Justice BR Gavai has been nominated as the Chairman of the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC).

Need for legal services

- Constitutional provision
 - Article 39A says that the government must make sure that the legal system promotes justice for everyone, giving equal opportunities.
 - It emphasizes providing free legal help through laws, plans, or any other means so that all citizens can access justice, regardless of economic or other challenges.

- State must ensure equality before the law and a legal system
 - Articles 14 and 22(1) also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before the law and a legal system that promotes justice based on equal opportunity.
 - Article 14 – Right to equality
 - Article 22 (1) – Rights to be informed of grounds for arrest.

Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC)

- Background
 - The idea of a legal aid programme was earlier floated in the 1950s.
 - However, it was in 1980 that a committee at the national level was established under the chairmanship of then SC judge Justice PN Bhagwati.
 - The Committee for Implementing Legal Aid Schemes started monitoring legal aid activities throughout India.
- Legal backing
 - The Supreme Court Legal Services Committee was constituted under Section 3A of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- Aim
 - To provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of society in cases falling under the top court's jurisdiction.
- Composition
 - Section 3A of the Act states that the Central Authority (the National Legal Services Authority or NALSA) shall constitute the committee.
 - The committee consists of a sitting SC judge, who is the chairman, along with other members possessing the experience and qualifications prescribed by the Centre.
 - Both the chairman and other members will be nominated by the CJI. Further, the CJI can appoint the Secretary to the Committee.
 - The Committee, in turn, can appoint officers and other employees as prescribed by the Centre, in consultation with the CJI.
- Role of centre
 - Under Section 27 of the 1987 Act, the Centre is empowered to make rules in consultation with CJI, by notification, to carry out the provisions of the Act.

Legal Services Authorities Act

- Aim
 - In 1987, the Legal Services Authorities Act was enacted to give a statutory base to legal aid programmes.
 - It aims to provide free and competent legal services to eligible groups, including women, children, SC/ST and EWS categories, industrial workers, disabled persons, and others.
- Constitution of NALSA in 1995

- Under the Act, NALSA was constituted to monitor and evaluate the implementation of legal aid programmes and to lay down policies for making legal services available.
 - A nationwide network has been envisaged under the Act for providing legal aid and assistance.
 - It also disburses funds and grants to State Legal Services Authorities and NGOs for implementing legal aid schemes and programmes.
 - The CJI is the patron-in-chief of NALSA.
 - Constitution of State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA)
 - In every state, State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA) were established to:
 - implement NALSA's policies and directions;
 - give free legal services to people, and conduct Lok Adalats.
 - An SLSA is headed by the Chief Justice of the respective High Court and includes the senior HC judge as its Executive Chairman.
 - The HC Chief Justice is the patron-in-chief of the SLSA.
 - District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs)
 - DLSA has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District. It is situated in the District Courts Complex and chaired by the District Judge of the respective district.
 - Taluka or Sub-Divisional Legal Services Committees
 - The Taluka or Sub-Divisional Legal Services Committees are headed by a senior civil judge.
 - Collectively, these bodies organise legal awareness camps, provide free legal services, and supply and obtain certified order copies and other legal documents, among other functions.
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Q1) What is Lok Adalat?

Lok Adalat is a statutory organization in India that settles disputes and grievances outside of court. It is a forum where cases that are pending in court or at the pre-litigation stage are settled amicably.

Q2) What is Article 39A of the Indian Constitution?

Article 39A of the Indian Constitution is about equal justice and free legal aid. It was added in 1976 by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act. Article 39A states that the state must ensure equal justice for all citizens. It also requires the state to provide free legal aid to citizens who may not have equal legal opportunities due to poverty or other disadvantages. This includes providing a lawyer to any citizen who is unable to engage due to poverty or any other disability.

Source: [Justice Gavai nominated as SC Legal Services Committee Chairman: What law says on free legal aid in India | Supreme Court Legal Service Committee](#)
