



NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
STRENGTHENING LEGAL AID DELIVERY MECHANISMS
AND CELEBRATION OF
LEGAL SERVICES DAY

November 8th & 9th 2025

Administrative Buildings Complex, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi - 110001

REPORT



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STRENGTHENING LEGAL AID DELIVERY MECHANISMS

8th-9th November, 2025

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA, organized the National Conference on "Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms" on 8th-9th November 2025 at the Supreme Court of India, New Delhi, to commemorate three decades of NALSA's service in advancing meaningful access to justice and to celebrate the Legal Services Day. The Conference reaffirmed the constitutional vision of Article 39A, ensuring that justice is accessible to all, irrespective of economic or social disadvantage. It brought together a distinguished gathering of Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, Executive Chairpersons and Member Secretaries of State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs), Secretaries to the Government of India, Registrars of the Supreme Court, Law Officers of India, senior members of the Bar, Chairmen & Members of Permanent Lok Adalats, Legal Aid Defence Counsels (LADCs), Panel Lawyers, and Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs), representing a unified national effort toward strengthening the institutional framework for legal aid delivery in India.

The Inaugural Function, held on 8th November 2025 at the Supreme Court of India, marked the commencement of the National Conference and the celebration of Legal Services Day, symbolizing three decades of NALSA's unwavering service to the cause of access to justice. The session was graced by the august presence of Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India; Hon'ble Mr. Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief, NALSA; Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA; Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Chairman, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee; and Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice. Also in attendance were Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, the Solicitor General of India, Law Officers, senior officers of the Government of India, and representatives from State Legal Services Authorities, High Court and District Legal Services

Authorities, Chairmen & Members of Permanent Lok Adalats, Legal Aid Defense Counsels (LADCs), Panel Lawyers, and Para-Legal Volunteers, from across the country. The Inaugural Function reflected the unity of the legislature, executive, and judiciary in reaffirming India's constitutional commitment to "Equal Justice for All." The session featured the Welcome Address by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Address by Hon'ble Minister Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, and Chief Justice's Address by Hon'ble Mr. Justice B.R. Gavai, followed by the screening of a short film on NALSA's journey and the launch of the Community Mediation Training Manual by the Hon'ble Prime Minister. In his inspiring remarks, the Prime Minister commended NALSA's pioneering work in strengthening access to justice through innovation, technology, and grassroots legal empowerment, describing legal aid as the bridge between the judiciary and the people. The session concluded with the Vote of Thanks by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, marking a memorable beginning to the two-day national deliberations on advancing legal aid delivery mechanisms in India.

The Conference deliberations were organized around five thematic working sessions, each addressing a critical component of India's legal aid architecture. The First Working Session, on the theme "*Institutional Defense for Inclusive Justice: The Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS) Approach*", was chaired by Hon'ble Mr. Justice J.K. Maheshwari, Judge, Supreme Court of India, and co-chaired by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava, Chief Justice, High Court of Madras, and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Nitin Jamdar, Chief Justice, High Court of Kerala. Hon'ble Mr. Justice V. Kameswar Rao, Executive Chairperson, Delhi State Legal Services Authority, and Hon'ble Smt. Justice Anu Sivaraman, Executive Chairperson, Karnataka State Legal Services Authority, were the speakers. The session emphasized the strengthening of LADCS to ensure professional, continuous, and accountable representation for undertrial and indigent accused persons across India.

The Second Working Session, titled "*Panel Lawyers at the Forefront: Strengthening Legal Aid for Inclusive Justice*", was chaired by Hon'ble Mrs. Justice B.V. Nagarathna, Judge, Supreme Court of India, and co-chaired by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice, High Court of Punjab & Haryana, and Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Sunita Agarwal, Chief Justice, High Court of Gujarat. The speakers were Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.S. Sonak, Executive Chairperson, Goa State Legal Services Authority, and Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. Sam Koshy, Executive Chairperson, Telangana State Legal Services Authority. The discussions focused on building the competence, accountability, and performance evaluation systems for panel lawyers, recognizing their vital role as professional anchors of the legal aid movement.

The Third Working Session, on *“Empowering Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs): Building Competence and Community Reach”*, was chaired by Hon’ble Mr. Justice M.M. Sundresh, Judge, Supreme Court of India, and co-chaired by Hon’ble Mr. Justice Harish Tandon, Chief Justice, High Court of Orissa, and Hon’ble Mr. Justice M.S. Ramachandra Rao, Chief Justice, High Court of Tripura. The session featured addresses by Hon’ble Mr. Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta, Executive Chairperson, Uttar Pradesh State Legal Services Authority, and Hon’ble Mr. Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque, Executive Chairperson, Kerala and Lakshadweep State Legal Services Authorities. The dialogue focused on recognizing PLVs as community anchors — the human bridge connecting legal institutions with citizens at the grassroots level — and emphasized their need for structured training and localized engagement.

The Fourth Working Session, titled *“Strengthening Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs): Reach, Regularity and Responsiveness”*, was chaired by Hon’ble Mr. Justice Pamidighantam Sri Narasimha, Judge, Supreme Court of India, and co-chaired by Hon’ble Mr. Justice Gurmeet Singh Sandhawalia, Chief Justice, High Court of Himachal Pradesh, and Hon’ble Mr. Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya, Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi. The speakers were Hon’ble Mrs. Justice Lisa Gill, Executive Chairperson, Haryana State Legal Services Authority, and Hon’ble Mr. Justice Alpesh Y. Kogje, Executive Chairperson, Gujarat State Legal Services Authority. The session underlined the importance of regular sittings, enhanced infrastructure, and greater public awareness to strengthen the PLA framework and promote pre-litigation dispute resolution.

The Fifth Working Session, on *“Financial Management of Legal Services Institutions”*, was chaired by Hon’ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA, and co-chaired by Hon’ble Mr. Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva, Chief Justice, High Court of Madhya Pradesh, and Hon’ble Mr. Justice Arun Palli, Chief Justice, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ashutosh Kumar, Chief Justice, Gauhati High Court, and Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra, Executive Chairperson, Punjab State Legal Services Authority, were the speakers. The session focused on transparency, prudent fund utilization, and capacity building in financial planning to ensure sustainability and accountability of Legal Services Institutions nationwide.

The Valedictory Session, held on 9th November 2025, marked the culmination of the National Conference with an inspiring reaffirmation of NALSA’s vision for accessible and inclusive justice. The session was graced

by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief, NALSA; Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA; and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Chairman, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee, along with other Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, Chief Justices, Executive Chairpersons and Member Secretaries of State Legal Services Authorities, senior Law Officers, and distinguished delegates. The session witnessed the launch of the National Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS) Dashboard by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, symbolizing NALSA's commitment to data-driven transparency and nationwide monitoring of legal aid delivery. The Valedictory Session thus encapsulated the Conference's enduring message—that legal aid in India has evolved from a service to a movement of empathy, empowerment, and justice for every citizen.

The making of the NALSA National Conference Report on “Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms” was a carefully coordinated institutional effort, reflecting teamwork, attention to detail, and a shared commitment to record the deliberations of the Conference in a manner befitting its national significance. Under the supervision of Shri Bharat Parashar, Member Secretary, NALSA, and Dr. Ajit Atri, Director, NALSA, the Officers on Special Duty (OSDs) — Shri. Sanjiv Pandey, Ms. Aarti Singh, Ms. Amandeep Sibia, Ms. Shreya Arora Mehta, and Ms. Aavritee Naithani — along with the designated rapporteurs, worked in close coordination to ensure that every address, discussion, and recommendation from the two-day event was comprehensively documented and presented with accuracy and coherence. The process began with each OSD being assigned to specific sessions of the Conference, supported by teams of stenographers, court assistants, and law researchers.

The Inaugural Function by the Hon'ble Prime Minister was documented jointly by Dr. Ajit Atri, and Ms. Shreya Arora Mehta, supported by a team of rapporteurs including Ms. Pallavi Diwakar, Ms. Shyamali Panda, and Mr. Ashish Kumar. Their joint effort ensured that the keynote was presented with precision and clarity, capturing the essence of the Prime Minister's vision of “Ease of Justice” and the institutional resolve to build an inclusive, technology-driven justice delivery system.

Ms. Aavritee Naithani, OSD, was entrusted with documenting the first working session on Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS) session as well as the Valedictory Session. Supported by Ms. Jyotika Narang, Ms. Nidhi Jha and Ms. Vijaya Mandal, she synthesized the deliberations that focused on

strengthening professional legal representation for the underprivileged and captured the concluding insights shared by the dignitaries during the valedictory session, including the reaffirmation of NALSA's mission for accessible justice.

Ms. Amandeep Sibia, OSD, prepared the report on the second working session on Panel Lawyers, assisted by Ms. Jyotika Narang, Mr. Arvindh Subramoniam, and Ms. Khushi Kochar, who compiled interventions and recommendations aimed at improving the competence, accountability, and systemic integration of panel lawyers across the country. Their report highlighted the evolving role of panel lawyers as the professional backbone of legal aid delivery.

Ms. Shreya Arora Mehta, OSD, led the documentation of the inaugural function addressed by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, two major working session 3 and 4 on Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs) and Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs) and final compilation of the present report. Assisted by Shri Bharat Bhushan, Ms. Komal Sahay, Ms. Komal Bansal and Ms. Pallavi Thakur, she coordinated the preparation of detailed session reports capturing the discussions, recommendations, and innovative practices shared during these sessions. The recommendations and way forward for legal services institutions as NALSA enters its fourth decade were also consolidated. Her team also documented the reflections of dignitaries, the launch of the Community Mediation Training Module, and the screening of the short film on NALSA's journey.

Ms. Aarti Singh, OSD, in collaboration with the Member Secretary, was responsible for compiling the Accounts and Financial Management Session, which focused on sustainability, transparency, and fiscal discipline across Legal Services Institutions. Her team—comprising Ms. Anjali Agrawal, Ms. Jyotika Narang, Ms. Shyamali Panda, and Mr. Ashish Kumar—meticulously recorded the discussions and recommendations that underscored the need for efficient fund management and capacity-building in financial oversight mechanisms.

The Valedictory Session, compiled under the supervision of Shri Bharat Parashar, Dr. Ajit Atri, and Ms. Aavritee Naithani, brought together the collective spirit of the Conference. The team comprising Shri Bharat Bhushan, Ms. Jyotika Narang, Ms. Pallavi Diwakar, Ms. Shyamali Panda, and Mr. Ashish Kumar synthesized the key takeaways, reaffirmations, and commitments made by Hon'ble dignitaries, participants, and State Legal Services Authorities.

Each OSD submitted their respective session report to the Director's office for integration, following which the drafts were standardized in tone, structure, and formatting to ensure a cohesive presentation. The final report thus represents a collective institutional achievement — the product of dedication, precision, and teamwork among NALSA's officers and rapporteurs. It stands as a record of the voices, ideas, and resolutions that shaped the National Conference, and as a guiding document for the effective implementation of its outcomes across Legal Services Institutions throughout India.

(Ms. Aavritee Naithani)

(Ms. Shreya Arora Mehta)

(Ms. Amandeep Sibia)

(Ms. Aarti Singh)

(Dr. Ajit Atri)

(Shri. Sanjiv Pandey)

(Shri Bharat Parashar)

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INAUGURAL FUNCTION

8th November, 2025



The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) organized a two-day National Conference on “Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms” on 8th–9th November, 2025, to commemorate three decades of NALSA’s service in advancing meaningful access to justice, along with the celebration of Legal Services Day. The Conference reaffirmed the shared national commitment to the constitutional vision of Article 39A, which mandates that justice must be accessible to every individual, irrespective of economic or social circumstances. It served as a platform to consolidate institutional experience, reflect on progress, and identify pathways for strengthening the legal aid framework in alignment with contemporary needs.

The Conference brought together Hon’ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India, Chief Justices and Judges of High Courts, Executive Chairpersons and Member Secretaries of State Legal Services Authorities, Secretaries of High Court Legal Service Committees, and District Legal Services Authorities, along with Chairpersons/ Members of Permanent Lok Adalats, Legal Aid Defence Counsels, Panel Lawyers, and Para-Legal Volunteers from across the country. Their participation ensured a comprehensive dialogue across all tiers of the legal services delivery system.

The deliberations of the Conference were structured around five pillars, each representing a component of the legal aid architecture in India:

1. Institutional Defence for Inclusive Justice: Strengthening the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System (LADCS) to ensure professional and continuous legal representation.
2. Panel Lawyers at the Forefront: Enhancing the capacity, accountability, and role clarity of Panel Lawyers as essential agents of legal empowerment.
3. Empowering Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs): Building competence and community outreach, recognizing PLVs as the link between legal institutions and society.
4. Strengthening Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs): Expanding their reach, regularity, and responsiveness to promote pre-litigation and amicable settlement.
5. Financial Management of Legal Services Institutions: Ensuring sustainability, transparency, and efficient utilization of legal aid funds.

A key highlight of the Conference was the launch of the Community Mediation Training Module, marking an important step in strengthening grassroots dispute resolution and fostering amicable settlement mechanisms.

A short film was screened during the Conference on NALSA activities, depicting NALSA's journey during the last decade. The film highlighted the expansion of legal aid services across institutions and communities and the impact of legal awareness, representation, mediation and outreach efforts on individuals and vulnerable groups across the country. It demonstrated how the legal services have evolved into a nationwide network of support, empowerment, and access to justice.

The Conference also featured the National Photography and Art Showcase, highlighting stories of legal empowerment and community outreach. Further, in alignment with the Conference theme of digitization and data-driven institutional strengthening, the Legal Aid Defence Counsel (LADC) Dashboard was launched, providing real-time monitoring and performance tracking of legal aid defence services across districts, thereby enhancing transparency and enabling evidence-based planning.

The Conference served as a platform for shared reflection, institutional coordination, and collective renewal of commitment to strengthening legal aid delivery in India, ensuring that justice remains accessible, dignified, and people-centered.



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
**STRENGTHENING LEGAL
AID DELIVERY MECHANISMS**

AND CELEBRATION OF
LEGAL SERVICES DAY

CHIEF GUEST
HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER
SHRI NARENDRA MODI



Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

The Inaugural Function of the National Conference was convened on 8th November, 2025, at the Supreme Court of India, New Delhi, alongside the observance of Legal Services Day, marking the 30-year journey of NALSA as the principal institution guiding access to justice in India. The function reflected the unity and shared purpose of the judiciary, the executive, and legal services institutions in reaffirming the constitutional commitment to “Equal Justice for All.”

The Session was graced by the esteemed presence of:

- Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India
- Hon'ble Mr. Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, Chief Justice of India & Patron-in-Chief, NALSA
- Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India & Executive Chairman, NALSA
- Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, Judge, Supreme Court of India & Chairman, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee
- Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice

The Inaugural Session was attended by Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, Solicitor General of India, Executive Chairpersons and Member Secretaries of State Legal Services Authorities, Secretaries, Government of India, Secretaries of High Court Legal Services Committees and District Legal Service Authorities, District Judges, Members of the Central Authority, Panel Lawyers, Legal Aid Defence Counsels, Para-Legal Volunteers, Members of Permanent Lok Adalats, officers of the District

Judiciary, Senior members of the bar and other distinguished participants from across the country.

The Session set the tone and vision for the Conference, underscoring the imperative to strengthen institutional legal aid systems, enhance community-level outreach, harness technology for inclusive justice, and reinforce the foundational commitment to justice that is accessible, humane, and meaningful

Welcome Address
Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant,
Judge, Supreme Court & Executive Chairman, NALSA

Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA, delivered the Welcome Address at the Inaugural Session of the National Conference on “*Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms.*” Extending a warm welcome to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief of NALSA Justice B.R. Gavai, Hon'ble Justice Vikram Nath, Hon'ble Law Minister Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, and all dignitaries present, Justice Surya Kant reflected upon the significance of Legal Services Day as a moment to re-examine the role of justice institutions in the lives of citizens. He stated that the true measure of a justice system is not only in its ability to decide complex questions of law but in its capacity to touch the lives of ordinary individuals with dignity and fairness. He emphasized that Constitution of India was designed not just to create a legal order but to uphold fairness, dignity, and equality for all. Legal aid, he said, is where this vision becomes reality- ensuring that the poor, the marginalized, and the “invisible victims of the system” can assert their rights and seek remedies.

Justice Surya Kant highlighted that the *Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987*, gave statutory effect to Articles 14 and 39A of the Constitution of India, creating a nationwide structure through NALSA to provide free legal aid, spread awareness, and encourage fair dispute resolution beyond adversarial litigation. Over the years, millions have benefited — through conciliations, free legal representation, compensation, and mediation — transforming the law into relief and stability for citizens.

He noted that NALSA's initiatives now extend beyond traditional legal aid, focusing on rehabilitation in prisons, support for families of defence personnel, institutionalizing mediation, and outreach to communities facing social and environmental challenges.

Looking forward, he emphasized that access to legal help must become simpler and more humane. While technology offers immense potential through online clinics, mediation, and digital portals, it must work alongside local knowledge, linguistic accessibility, and empathy.

Justice Surya Kant underlined that the mission of legal aid requires shared ownership among judges, lawyers, law students, para-legal volunteers, and civil society. He concluded by reaffirming NALSA's resolve to build a justice system that is people-centric, compassionate, and responsive — one that makes justice not only accessible but also humane, fulfilling the noblest promise of the Constitution.

Address
Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal,
Union Minister of State (I/C) for Law & Justice

Hon'ble Minister of Law and Justice, Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, addressed the Inaugural Session of the National Conference on "*Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms*" organized by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) to commemorate its 30th anniversary and Legal Services Day. At the outset, he greeted Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief of NALSA Justice B.R. Gavai, Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant, Executive Chairman of NALSA, Hon'ble Justice Vikram Nath, and all dignitaries present.

Expressing pride in NALSA's three-decade-long journey, Shri Meghwal recalled the foresight of India's Constitution-makers who, through Article 39A, ensured that no citizen would be denied justice due to poverty or disadvantage. He said this constitutional vision continues to inspire the ideal of "Justice for All." Reflecting on NALSA's remarkable work, he praised its contribution in making justice more accessible and inclusive, especially for marginalized sections, describing it as a model of India's citizen-centric and bottom-up governance that strengthens democracy. He emphasized that democracy's true success lies not only in guaranteeing justice but in ensuring *equal access* to it, urging all stakeholders to view justice delivery as a shared responsibility, not merely a constitutional duty.

The Hon'ble Minister highlighted the expansion of Tele-Law, through which over one crore beneficiaries have received pre-litigation legal guidance, and the Nyaya Bandhu Pro Bono Legal Services initiative, which has furthered citizen participation in justice delivery. He emphasized that technology is

being used to strengthen access to justice in local languages and to simplify the pathway to legal resolution. Referring to budgetary commitment, he noted that the financial allocation to NALSA has been significantly enhanced to support strengthened legal aid delivery and institutional capacity-building.

He reaffirmed that the Government, under the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of "*Reform – Perform – Transform*," is working in close collaboration with the Judiciary to strengthen legal aid delivery. NALSA's budget, he shared, has risen from ₹68 crore in 2015–16 to ₹400 crore this year, reflecting the government's commitment to legal empowerment.

Commending NALSA's inclusive approach, he appreciated its initiatives for vulnerable groups such as acid attack survivors, disaster-affected persons, prisoners, victims of human trafficking, unorganized sector workers, children, tribal communities, persons with mental disabilities, and senior citizens. These efforts, he noted, embody the true spirit of constitutional service.

He also highlighted *e-Lok Adalats* as an example of how technology is delivering justice to citizens' doorsteps and observed that digital outreach, online legal services, and community participation will define the future of India's justice system — now serving as a model for the Global South.

Referring to the *First Regional Conference on Access to Legal Aid for the Global South* (November 2023), he noted that India is emerging as a leader in promoting access to justice among developing nations. Looking ahead, he invited all stakeholders to envision the future of India's Legal Aid Ecosystem by 2047 — a system that is flexible, compassionate, and citizen-oriented.

He lauded the joint efforts of the Supreme Court, NALSA, State Legal Services Authorities, lawyers, and Para-Legal Volunteers, calling them a shining example of *Cooperative Federalism in Justice Delivery*.

In conclusion, Shri Meghwal congratulated NALSA and all stakeholders for 30 years of exemplary service and expressed confidence that their collective efforts will continue to advance an inclusive and accessible justice system. He ended his address by echoing the NALSA theme song, reaffirming the shared commitment to "***Justice for All.***"

Address
Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai
Hon'ble Chief Justice of India & Patron-in-Chief, NALSA

Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief of NALSA, Justice B.R. Gavai, delivered the Address at the National Conference on “Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms,” organized to mark NALSA’s 30th anniversary and Legal Services Day. At the outset, he extended heartfelt gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for gracing the occasion, stating that his presence symbolized the united commitment of the legislature, executive, and judiciary to ensure access to justice for all. He also congratulated NALSA and Justice Surya Kant for organizing the conference and selecting themes such as strengthening LADCS, capacity building of lawyers and para-legal volunteers, empowering Permanent Lok Adalats, and improving financial management of legal services institutions.

Justice Gavai observed that these themes encourage both reflection and vision — urging stakeholders to assess their progress and build a more inclusive future for justice delivery. He recalled Mahatma Gandhi’s moral talisman, reminding that decisions must always be guided by consideration for the poorest and weakest, ensuring that justice becomes a right for every citizen and not a privilege of a few.

Sharing a personal experience from his visit to a relief camp in Churachandpur, Manipur, he recounted how an elderly woman’s words, **“बने रहो, भैया” (“Live long, brother”)**, reminded him that the real success of legal aid lies not in statistics but in the gratitude and renewed hope of citizens who once felt unseen.

He spoke with respect to the para-legal volunteers and panel lawyers and celled them the “soldiers of the legal aid movement”, whose compassion bridges the gap between the Constitution’s promise and people’s everyday realities. Their presence ensures that the justice system is not distant, but attentive and accessible. Legal aid, he said, must evolve from being reactive to proactive — anticipating challenges and reaching out before injustice occurs.

Reflecting on 75 years of India’s Constitution, Justice Gavai reaffirmed that justice — social, economic, and political — will be realized only when every citizen feels that the justice system belongs to them. Quoting Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, he reminded that the struggle for justice is “a battle not for

wealth or power, but for the reclamation of human personality,” capturing the true spirit of the legal aid movement.

He concluded by urging all stakeholders to serve with compassion and conviction, noting that every act of legal aid, however small, contributes to nation-building.

Screening of Short Film on NALSA Activities

During the Inaugural Session, a short film was screened showing NALSA’s journey and achievements over the years. The film highlighted the growth of NALSA into a dynamic and responsive national institution dedicated to realizing the constitutional mandate of Access to Justice for All. It depicted how NALSA has progressively expanded its reach, strengthened its institutional framework, and innovated in delivering legal aid and justice services at the grassroots.

The film outlined the extensive institutional network of Legal Services Authorities across the country- 37 State Legal Services Authorities, 707 District Authorities, 2,440 Taluk Committees, and over 12,000 Legal Aid Clinics supported by cadre of 48,499 panel lawyers and 48,380 para legal volunteers- forming a robust system for delivering justice at the grassroot.

The short film reflected NALSA’s measurable growth and impact: From 2015 to 2025, over 1.61 crore citizens have received legal aid, ₹2,354 crore disbursed as victim compensation, and more than 40 crore cases settled through National Lok Adalats and 13,11,345 cases through Permanent Lok Adalats. Between 2015-2025, mediation has reached over 8.6 lakh people, while between January 2025 and August 2025 alone, NALSA provided legal aid to over 1.57 lakh prisoners, with the percentage of releases on UTRC recommendations rising from 47% in April-June 2024 to 55% in April-June 2025, marking steady progress in ensuring timely justice.

It also featured NALSA’s major initiatives — Spruha, Jagriti, Veer Parivar, and Access to Justice for Victims of Human-Wildlife Conflict — which reflect its inclusive and compassionate approach to justice delivery. It further underlined NALSA’s digital transformation through the Digital Legal Aid Portal and e-Lok Adalats, symbolizing innovation, transparency, and a people-centric approach to legal services.

In essence, the short film reaffirmed NALSA’s ongoing journey of service, trust, and transformation in strengthening the justice delivery system and ensuring that justice reaches every individual in need.

E-Launch of Community Mediation Training Module

The Community Mediation Training Module was e-launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. The module has been developed by NALSA to strengthen community-based dispute resolution and to promote peaceful settlement of local conflicts through dialogue, empathy and participation. The brief presentation during the launch introduced the core philosophy of the Manual—that justice is not limited to courtrooms alone, but begins with communication, mutual respect and understanding at the community level. The Module is designed as a practical training tool to equip community members and volunteers to act as neutral facilitators and help parties resolve everyday disputes amicably, thereby fostering harmony, restoring relationships, and advancing access to justice in its most grassroots form.

Address Shri Narendra Modi Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi graced the Inaugural Session of the National Conference on “*Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms*”, organized on the occasion of NALSA's 30th anniversary and Legal Services Day. He congratulated the judiciary and legal fraternity, extending best wishes for the 20th National Conference.

At the outset, the Prime Minister lauded the conference as a vital step toward strengthening India's judicial system and ensuring access to justice for all. He acknowledged the presence of Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Justice B.R. Gavai, Justice Surya Kant, Justice Vikram Nath, and Union Law Minister Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, noting that such collective participation reflected the unity of the legislature, executive, and judiciary in advancing justice delivery. He emphasized that *true justice* is when it is accessible, timely, and inclusive — reaching every citizen without discrimination. Commending NALSA and Legal Services Authorities across all levels, he described them as an effective bridge between the judiciary and common citizens.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister commended the Conference as a significant step toward ensuring Ease of Justice, alongside national commitments to Ease of Doing Business and Ease of Living. He noted that legal aid plays a crucial role in ensuring that justice remains timely, affordable, and accessible, and acknowledged the role of Legal Services Authorities in resolving millions of

disputes through Lok Adalats and pre-litigation settlement. Highlighting the success of *Lok Adalats* and *pre-litigation settlements*, he noted that millions of disputes are now being resolved swiftly and amicably. Under the *Legal Aid Defence Counsel System (LADCS)*, nearly 8 lakh criminal cases have been disposed of within three years, significantly promoting *Ease of Justice* for the poor and marginalized.

The Prime Minister detailed the government's wider legal reforms — removing over 40,000 unnecessary compliances, *decriminalizing more than 3,400 legal provisions* under the *Jan Vishwas Act*, and *repealing 1,500 obsolete laws*. He highlighted the replacement of colonial-era laws with the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita*, *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita*, and *Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam*, marking a major transformation in India's legal architecture.

Commemorating NALSA's three decades of service, he appreciated its role in linking the judiciary to citizens in need. Many who approach Legal Services Authorities, he said, lack resources or representation — and giving them hope and support defines the true spirit of "*Service*" embedded in NALSA's mission. He urged all legal aid workers to continue serving with patience, professionalism, and compassion.

The Prime Minister launched *NALSA's Community Mediation Training Module*, calling it a revival of India's ancient practice of resolving disputes through dialogue and consensus. Rooted in the ethos of *Panchayats and local elders*, this tradition, he said, is now being modernized through the *Mediation Act*. He expressed confidence that this module will help train community mediators to foster harmony and reduce litigation.

Speaking on technology's transformative power, the Prime Minister noted that while technology can be disruptive, with a *pro-people focus*, it becomes a force for democratization. Citing examples such as *UPI* and *Digital India*, he highlighted how technology has empowered even the remotest villages. He described the *E-Courts Project* as a milestone in modernizing judicial processes — from e-filing to virtual hearings — and announced that its *Phase III* now has a budget exceeding ₹7,000 crore, reflecting the government's strong commitment to *digital justice delivery*.

Focusing on *legal awareness*, he underscored that justice cannot be achieved until citizens know their rights. He urged the spread of legal literacy, especially among the poor, women, and the elderly, and encouraged *law students* to work with rural communities to explain legal rights and

procedures. Partnering with *Self-Help Groups, Cooperatives, and Panchayati Raj Institutions*, he said, can bring legal knowledge to every household.

The Prime Minister also emphasized *language accessibility in justice*. Laws and judgments, he said, must be in languages people understand to ensure better compliance and reduce litigation. He praised the *Supreme Court's initiative* of translating over 80,000 judgments into 18 Indian languages, calling it a landmark effort that should continue across all judicial levels.

In conclusion, the Prime Minister urged the legal fraternity to envision what the justice system of a "*Viksit Bharat*" — a developed India — should look like, and to work collectively towards that vision. He congratulated NALSA and the entire legal community for their contribution to inclusive, accessible, and technology-driven justice, expressing gratitude for being part of this momentous occasion.

Vote of Thanks

**Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath,
Judge, Supreme Court of India &
Chairman, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee**

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, Judge, Supreme Court of India, delivered the Vote of Thanks at the Inaugural Function of the National Conference on "*Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms*."

He began by extending heartfelt gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for gracing the occasion and inspiring everyone with his visionary address. He observed that the Prime Minister's words had provided renewed direction and energy to collective efforts toward building an efficient, inclusive, and technology-driven justice system. Justice Nath lauded the Prime Minister's unwavering commitment to good governance and institutional innovation, which continues to guide the nation's progress. Expressing deep appreciation, he thanked Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief of NALSA, Justice B.R. Gavai, for his leadership and continuous encouragement in strengthening the legal aid movement across the country. He also extended gratitude to Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant, Chief Justice of India Designate and Executive Chairman of NALSA, for his tireless efforts and dynamic stewardship in advancing legal services institutions nationwide.

He further expressed sincere thanks to Hon'ble Minister of State for Law and Justice, Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, for his valuable insights and steadfast support toward NALSA's initiatives and reforms.

Quoting Helen Keller, Justice Nath remarked, *"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much,"* emphasizing the collective spirit that underpins the success of the legal aid movement.

Justice Nath also acknowledged the dedication and hard work of officers and staff of NALSA, the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee, the organizing team, and all participants who contributed to the success of the conference. He appreciated the short film showcased during the session, describing it as a powerful reflection of NALSA's transformative work at the grassroots level. Concluding his address, Justice Nath urged everyone to reaffirm their commitment to the constitutional promise of *"Equal Justice for All,"* as the nation celebrated Legal Services Day and 30 years of NALSA's impactful journey.

WORKING SESSION I
INSTITUTIONAL DEFENSE FOR INCLUSIVE JUSTICE:
THE LEGAL AID DEFENSE COUNSEL SYSTEM (LADCS) APPROACH
8th November, 2025, 10:00 AM to 11:15 AM

Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice J.K. Maheshwari, Judge, Supreme Court of India

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava, Chief Justice, High Court of Madras

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Nitin Jamdar, Chief Justice, High Court of Kerala

Speaker 1: Hon'ble Mr. Justice V. Kameswar Rao, Executive Chairperson, Delhi State Legal Services Authority

Speaker 2: Hon'ble Smt. Justice Anu Sivaraman, Executive Chairperson, Telangana State Legal Services Authority

Moderator: Ms. Aavritee Naithani, Judicial Magistrate-I-cum-Additional Civil Judge (Junior Division), Bihar/ Officer on Special Duty, NALSA

INTRODUCTION OF THE SESSION
BY THE MODERATOR

The session commenced with the Moderator, extending a welcome to all participants and briefly outlining the theme of the Working Session. A brief overview of the LADCS framework, its objectives, structure, and the role of full-time defense counsel teams at the district level was given via PowerPoint presentation.

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE J.K. MAHESHWARI
JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Hon'ble Chair, Mr. Justice J.K Maheshwari, Judge, Supreme Court of India, commenced the session by extending a warm welcome to all participants. He emphasized that the deliberation on Institutional Defense for Inclusive Justice holds particular significance as it concerns the evolution of the LADCS. He noted that the LADCS represents a defining shift from perceiving legal aid merely as a service to recognizing it as a structured and enduring institution within the justice system.

Hon'ble Chair underscored that the critical question before the system today is not whether LADCS is conceptually sound, but how effectively it can be implemented. He identified key challenges in this regard, including recruitment and training of defense counsel, which must transition from routine procedural exercises to purposeful capacity-building.

A central concern he raised was the need to build trust, both within institutions and among the communities served, ensuring that the defense provided under LADCS is substantive and not merely symbolic. He urged the participants to focus the dialogue on practical concerns: improving district-level functioning, ensuring representation that is timely and of high quality, and developing mechanisms that build efficiency and confidence in the system.

Hon'ble Chair expressed confidence that the discussions to follow would contribute meaningfully toward transforming the envisioned model of institutional defense into a durable reality of inclusive justice.

REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIR

1. Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava, Chief Justice, High Court of Madras

Hon'ble Co-Chair 1 began by tracing the historical development of the legal aid framework in India. He recalled that *Article 39A*, introduced through the *42nd Constitutional Amendment*, 1976, marked the first constitutional recognition of the right to free legal aid. However, in the absence of a concrete legal structure, the idea remained largely aspirational. In 1980, a committee chaired by Justice P.N. Bhagwati presented the first structured proposal for providing free legal aid. Subsequently, with the enactment of the *Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987*, India achieved a formal legal framework that emphasized not only “free” but also “competent” legal aid. He highlighted that this dual emphasis on accessibility and competence, formed the foundation of an equitable legal aid system.

Further, Hon'ble Co-Chair 1 noted that, while India's efforts toward legal aid evolved gradually, other countries had already developed structured and institutionalized systems, particularly the Public Defender System seen in nations such as the United States, Chile, and South Africa. These models were characterized by full-time, dedicated defenders supported by organized offices and administrative structures.

Hon'ble Co-Chair 1 then detailed the evolution of the Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS). He first referred to the *NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010*, which introduced the concept of institutionalized legal aid delivery, emphasizing the selection of competent lawyers, office support, monitoring mechanisms, and capacity-building measures. Then Hon'ble Co-Chair 1, highlighted that a significant milestone came with the 2022 National Conference at Jaipur, co-hosted by the Rajasthan State Legal Services Authority under his leadership, where a comprehensive LADCS model was finalized after extensive deliberations among the Executive Chairpersons of the State Legal Services Authorities.

Further, regarding the LADCS model, Hon'ble Co-Chair 1 underlined the importance of induction and orientation programmes, alongside continuous capacity-building initiatives to maintain high professional standards.

Addressing the operational challenges, Hon'ble Co-Chair 1 observed that the remuneration structure under the current system might not adequately reflect the volume and complexity of work undertaken by LADCS counsels. He suggested the need for periodic revision of the honorarium and a differentiated fee structure based on city or district classification to attract and retain competent legal talent, especially in metropolitan areas. Hon'ble Co-Chair 1 also called for micro-level analysis to assess the system's functioning, identify existing gaps, and propose improvements in future iterations of the scheme.

2. Hon'ble Mr. Justice Nitin Jamdar, Chief Justice, High Court of Kerala

Hon'ble Co-Chair 2 focused on the two themes: (i) the value addition brought by the Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS), and (ii) recruitment, training, and capacity building.

He noted that the LADCS has significantly enhanced access to justice compared to the earlier panel lawyer system. It was noted that from *June to September 2024*, over 9 lakh beneficiaries received legal aid under the new framework. Establishment of full-time, district-level offices has created dedicated access points for legal aid, reducing dependence on police or ad hoc panel lawyers. As of *September 2025*, 68 LADCS units are functional across the country. Hon'ble Co-Chair highlighted that full-time defense counsels now ensure continuous representation before courts, eliminating adjournments due to non-availability of lawyers, and enabling proactive jail outreach, with over 25,000 prison visits recorded in September 2025. Early

intervention has also expedited bail applications, helping to address overcrowding in prisons.

He further emphasized improved coordination with DLSAs, streamlined case reporting, and enhanced communication between defense counsels, prisoners' families, and authorities. The system's structured reporting mechanism has strengthened data-driven decision-making.

On recruitment and capacity building, Hon'ble Co-Chair 2 observed that while over 6,300 *counsels* are presently appointed, many districts remain understaffed. He suggested introducing rolling recruitment cycles and creating pre-screened waiting lists to fill vacancies promptly. To attract and retain experienced criminal lawyers, he stressed revising remuneration and improving office infrastructure. He also proposed continuous professional development through refresher courses, forensic literacy training, and digital skill modules (covering e-Courts, e-Prisons, etc.).

He underscored the need for mentorship programs involving senior counsels and retired judges, as well as regular in-office discussions for collaborative learning. He suggested that judicial inputs could be incorporated into performance evaluations to identify specific training needs. Concluding his address, he shared a practitioner's reflection that LADCS transformed the role of legal aid lawyers, from working in isolation to working as a team within an institutional framework, which instils greater confidence and professionalism.

VIEW OF THE HON'BLE SPEAKERS

1. Hon'ble Mr. Justice V. Kameswar Rao, Executive Chairperson, Delhi State Legal Services Authority

Hon'ble Speaker 1 spoke on two key themes, trust-building mechanisms to ensure quality defense services, and strengthening the existing Legal Aid Defense Counsel (LADC) framework.

He commended the LADC Scheme as a well-conceived and efficiently functioning model, noting its clear hierarchy, accountability, and continuity of representation from pre-arrest to appeal stages. However, with a significant rise in beneficiaries, he emphasized the need to augment manpower, suggesting an increase in the number of Deputy and Assistant Chief LADCs to ensure adequate court representation and prevent absenteeism during case hearings.

Hon'ble Speaker 1 stressed the importance of performance assessment to enhance public trust. He proposed a structured multi-tier appraisal mechanism involving self-evaluation by LADCs, feedback from presiding judges, and periodic assessment by DLSA Chairpersons, compiled at the SLISA level for final grading. He suggested quarterly reviews to enable timely corrective measures. He also, suggested developing a comprehensive digital appraisal system to monitor LADC performance, track case handling, and maintain annual records beyond existing manual or spreadsheet-based reviews.

To strengthen beneficiary engagement, he recommended expanding jail outreach through regular visits and video conferencing facilities. He further advised incorporating custodial rights, gender sensitivity, and child protection in training modules, to be conducted quarterly at the state level.

Hon'ble Speaker 1 also emphasized the creation of inter-district digital platforms for sharing best practices, and directed that LADCs should regularly update their case data on the LACMS portal. He suggested integrating an LADC category in the e-Prisons portal to monitor case progress and reduce pendency.

Concluding, he observed that the LADC system has shown measurable progress and that continuous evaluation and adaptation will further enhance its effectiveness and credibility.

2. Hon'ble Smt. Justice Anu Sivaraman, Executive Chairperson, Telangana State Legal Services Authority

Hon'ble Speaker 2 highlighted the dual administrative and litigation responsibilities of Chief LADCs and underscored the importance of adequate infrastructure, trained support staff, and centralized reporting systems for effective functioning. To overcome fragmented manual reporting, she emphasized the ongoing digitalization of case management through a Management Information System (MIS) dashboard and uniform data entry protocols.

Drawing from the experience of the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority (KSLSA), she noted that there are currently 30 Chief LADCs, 38 Deputy Chiefs, and 168 Assistant LADCs, supported by clerks, data entry operators, and peons. She observed that Wi-Fi facilities, legal resources, and regular monthly and quarterly review meetings have strengthened the system.

Hon'ble Speaker proposed the development of a structured questionnaire and online reporting mechanism for jail visits, integrated with location mapping and duration tracking, to improve transparency and reduce paperwork.

Emphasizing the need for more LADCs, adequate office space, and stronger infrastructural support, particularly in urban centres, she also suggested expanding the LADC framework to cover beneficiaries under the Juvenile Justice Act, Mental Health Care Act, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act by facilitating visits and reporting from respective institutions.

INTERACTIVE SESSION

The session was then opened for discussion, during which questions were invited from the audience.

Question 1: Hon'ble Judge of Calcutta High Court cum In-charge of *Andaman & Nicobar Islands* sought clarification on whether, despite the scheme prohibiting private practice, it could be modified to permit LADCs to take up a limited number of private cases (for instance, 5–10 cases), so as to attract and retain a larger talent pool, since the current restriction discourages some advocates from joining.

Response: The Chair clarified that at the present stage, such relaxation is not feasible, as the core objective and defining feature of the LADC Scheme is exclusivity of engagement, ensuring that the counsels devote their full professional attention to legal aid work and refrain from private practice.

Question 2: The Member Secretary, Uttarakhand State Legal Services Authority, raised a query regarding the criteria for allotment of cases among Amicus Curiae, Panel Lawyers, and Legal Aid Defense Counsels (LADCs), as presently all three systems are operating simultaneously in the courts.

Response: The Chair clarified that Amicus Curiae are usually appointed directly by the courts, while Panel Lawyers are engaged upon recommendation and as per the existing empanelment norms of the Legal Services Authorities. In contrast, the LADC system ensures continuous legal representation beginning from the pre-arrest stage to the trial stage, through institutionalized engagement. The Chair further noted that NALSA's

vision is to progressively transition towards a fully institutionalized LADC model, reducing dependence on the panel system.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

Reflecting on the LADCS, Hon'ble Chair noted that the Scheme represents a significant institutional advancement undertaken by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). However, he emphasized that the system continues to encounter operational challenges relating to awareness, infrastructure, staffing, and mechanisms for performance accountability. The Hon'ble Chair highlighted the need to strengthen the *recognition and dignity* accorded to the defense function within the public justice system, underscoring that legal aid defense counsels are not engaged in charitable service but in upholding constitutional justice as equal partners in the administration of justice.

He observed that the discussions during the session reaffirmed a foundational principle: access to competent legal representation is not a privilege, but an essential component of access to justice, and lies at the core of the constitutional guarantee of equality before law.

During the deliberations, several constructive suggestions emerged, including the need to enhance communication channels between Under Trial Prisoners (UTPs) and LADCs, adopt technology-based platforms for monitoring case progress, and develop equitable, growth-oriented incentive structures for defense counsel to ensure uniform professional standards across jurisdictions.

Hon'ble Chair concluded by urging that the commitment to institutional defense must extend beyond recommendations and translate into sustained action. The LADCS, he stated, is not a temporary initiative but a structural reform aimed at advancing a more compassionate and credible justice system. He stressed that inclusive justice must not remain an aspiration, but must be realized in practice, ensuring that *the last, the lost, and the least* have meaningful access to legal representation and justice.

WORKING SESSION II
PANEL LAWYERS AT THE FOREFRONT:
STRENGTHENING LEGAL AID FOR INCLUSIVE JUSTICE
8th November, 2025, 11:30 AM to 12:45 PM

Chair: Hon'ble Mrs. Justice B.V. Nagarathna, Judge, Supreme Court of India

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice, Punjab & Haryana High Court

Co-chair: Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Sunita Agarwal, Chief Justice, Gujarat High Court

Speaker 1: Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.S. Sonak, Executive Chairperson, Goa State Legal Services Authority

Speaker 2: Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. Sam Koshy, Executive Chairperson, Telangana State Legal Services Authority

Moderator: Ms. Amandeep Sibia, Addl. District Judge, Gujarat/ Officer on Special Duty, NALSA

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR
HON'BLE MRS. JUSTICE B.V. NAGARATHNA
JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Hon'ble Mrs. Justice B.V. Nagarathna, Judge, Supreme Court of India, opened the session by underlining her personal connection with the subject, having herself served as a Panel Lawyer for the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority and the High Court Legal Services Committee from 1998 to 2008. She emphasized that her observations arise from her direct experience.

Justice Nagarathna observed that Article 39-A of the Constitution embodies the State's commitment to ensure *justice—social, economic and political—* and that true access to justice requires both access to courts and quality of representation. Despite the existence of human infrastructure at every level, from Taluka to Supreme Court, quality legal aid remains a distant dream.

Justice Nagarathna identified major causes such as uneven empanelment, lack of diversity, inadequate training and discouraging honorarium structures. Stressing that "*legal aid to the poor does not mean poor legal aid*", she highlighted the urgent need to build citizen's confidence in legal aid services, which currently remains low despite statutory entitlements. Justice Nagarathna further observed that a large section of society remains unaware

of their very right to free legal aid, underscoring the importance of sustained awareness and outreach efforts.

It was noted, wide disparity persists between legal services representation and private representation, both in quality and perception. She called for systemic reforms to bridge this gap and bring parity between the two, emphasizing that the same standards of diligence and professionalism must be applied by the panel lawyers to legal aid matters as they do in private practice.

Justice Nagarathna underscored the need within the district judiciary to ensure that Panel Lawyers diligently attend to their cases at the District and Taluka court levels, emphasizing that quality and effective assistance must begin at the very grassroots of the judicial system, from where appeals to higher courts emanate. It was further emphasized that advocates engaged in legal aid must approach their role with a sense of mission and passion.

Justice Nagarathna emphasized the need for regular assessment of Panel Lawyers to ensure that they attend court proceedings diligently, provide quality legal services, refrain from demanding fees from beneficiaries and offer proper representation. Justice Nagarathna further proposed instituting a feedback mechanism to obtain responses from citizens who receive legal aid regarding the quality of assistance rendered. Justice Nagarathna suggested that a structured feedback form be provided to every litigant availing legal aid to evaluate the performance of the representing advocate, with its format to be determined by the Executive Chairperson of the respective State Legal Services Authority.

Justice Nagarathna also highlighted the systematic delay in the extension of legal aid facilities to litigants, pointing to the time-consuming screening process within Legal Services Authorities, where files often move from desk to desk before a Panel Lawyer is finally assigned. Justice Nagarathna questioned the reasons behind such delays and asserted that there ought to be none.

To streamline the process, Justice Nagarathna stressed the need for dynamic and mission-oriented judicial officers to be provided the opportunity to serve as Member Secretaries of Legal Services Authorities for effective discharge of duties at every level. Justice Nagarathna further suggested that a structured training module for judicial officers be introduced to prepare them.

In conclusion, Justice Nagarathna posed guiding questions:

1. How to attract and retain quality Panel Lawyers? What measures are adopted to identify and empanel competent and dedicated advocates?
2. How to ensure transparency and robust mentoring?
3. How to create synergy between senior and junior lawyers on the panel?
4. To what extent the fee structure for Panel Lawyers is rationalized?

REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIRS

1. Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice, Punjab & Haryana High Court

Justice Sheel Nagu, likened Panel Lawyers to *“soldiers who go to battle for justice”*, underscoring their central role in the legal aid movement. Justice Nagu observed that while both quality and quantity are vital to a robust panel system, quality must remain paramount.

To ensure competence and commitment, Justice Nagu suggested that honorarium structures be revisited and indexed to the cost of living to counter stagnation over time. Citing the experience of Punjab and Haryana, where Panel Lawyers receive ₹20,000 for contested High Court cases and ₹10,000 for uncontested ones, it was noted that rational and regularly revised remuneration encourages diligence and professionalism.

Justice Nagu further emphasized that case allocation must be personally supervised by the District & Sessions Judge in the capacity of Chairperson of the DLSA, assisted by the Secretary of the DLSA, to ensure fairness and parity among advocates of varying competence levels. Limiting the number of cases assigned, ideally to 20–30 per lawyer, would help maintain quality and adequate attention to each case.

Justice Nagu proposed that merit-based selection and credit-based assessment should govern empanelment and continuation, supported by induction and refresher courses through State Judicial Academies. Justice Nagu advocated establishing electronic libraries at DLSAs and recognition through appreciation certificates for high-performing advocates.

Justice Nagu also recommended that experienced Panel Lawyers be given preference for engagement under the Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS), noting that they already handle a comparable quality and volume

of work. Such preference would both recognize their contribution and serve as an incentive for continued excellence in legal aid services.

Justice Nagu further noted that mentoring remains inadequately implemented across many High Courts, with Monitoring and Mentoring Committees (MMCs) often existing only on paper. He emphasized that effective mentoring through guidance, support and incentives is essential for the professional growth and performance of Panel Lawyers.

Justice Nagu concluded by observing that the adoption of these practical measures would go a long way in strengthening the legal aid delivery framework and ensuring both quality and accountability.

Justice Nagarathna endorsed Justice Nagu's observations, appreciating Punjab and Haryana's higher fee benchmarks and concurring that Panel Lawyers truly are the "*foot soldiers*" of India's access-to-justice movement.

2. Hon'ble Ms. Justice Sunita Agarwal, Chief Justice, Gujarat High Court

Justice Sunita Agarwal opened her address by referring to the data indicating that nearly 80% of India's population is eligible for legal aid and that over 40,000 Panel Lawyers are presently empanelled across the country. Justice Agarwal emphasized the need to overcome barriers that limit access and to ensure that those who enter the system receive quality representation, so that access to justice does not remain a distant dream.

Justice Agarwal highlighted that although the *NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010* already forms a comprehensive legal aid framework, the true challenge lies not in law but in its faithful implementation.

As Patron-in-Chief of Gujarat SLISA, Justice Agarwal acknowledged the existing gaps in the empanelment, monitoring and mentoring of Panel Lawyers. Justice Agarwal observed that the system is yet to be implemented in the robust manner as envisaged under the NALSA Regulations. Justice Agarwal pledged to work closely with the Executive Chairperson and members of Gujarat SLISA to strengthen the structure of empanelment, monitoring and mentoring of Panel Lawyers.

Justice Agarwal emphasized the need to institutionalize the role of Panel Lawyers, encouraging them to see themselves as integral partners in the justice delivery system rather than external associates. Justice Agarwal

underscored the importance of direct interaction with Panel Lawyers not merely at the DLSA level but also by Member Secretaries and, at times, by the Executive Chairperson and Patron-in-Chief. Justice Agarwal remarked that when leadership engages directly with the “ground force”, it serves as a powerful source of motivation.

Justice Agarwal further highlighted that quality legal aid depends not only on legal competence but also on sensitization and continuous training of those providing it. For this purpose, the Mentoring and Monitoring Committees (MMCs) must function actively, seeking feedback from DLSAs, presiding officers and other stakeholders on the performance of Panel Lawyers.

Justice Agarwal elaborated that MMCs should prepare structured reports based on these inputs and forward them to the Member Secretary, who in turn should place them before the Executive Chairperson and, subsequently, the Patron-in-Chief. Justice Agarwal suggested that such reports be reviewed quarterly at the State level, ensuring proper evaluation and follow-up at every stage.

Justice Agarwal concluded that if this process is diligently followed, it would substantially strengthen the system and ensure the delivery of quality legal aid, thereby addressing the questions raised by the Hon’ble Chair.

Justice Nagarathna, in response, thanked Justice Agarwal for her pragmatic approach and added that part-payment of honorarium at the time of case assignment, followed by the balance upon disposal would help institutionalise both motivation and accountability across the system.

VIEWS OF THE HON’BLE SPEAKERS

1. Hon’ble Mr. Justice M.S. Sonak, Executive Chairperson, Goa SLSA

Justice Sonak in his address talked about *Strengthening Empanelment and the Way Forward*.

Justice Sonak, recalled the words of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, who had observed in the 1970s that the legal system, including the police machinery, often appeared “*anti-dalit, anti-poor and anti-marginalised*”, and that “*the law barks at all but bites only the poor, the powerless, the illiterate and the ignorant*”.

Justice Sonak observed that while India has made notable progress since those words were written, disparities in quality and perception between legal aid representation and private representation still persist.

Justice Sonak observed that, although three decades have passed since then, the task of strengthening access to justice remains unfinished. While acknowledging substantial progress, Justice Sonak emphasized that *“we still have miles to go before we can afford to rest.”* The effectiveness of the legal aid system, he noted, depends not only on the number of Panel Lawyers but also on their quality, as true excellence in legal aid must emerge from collective, institutional effort rather than individual merit alone.

Justice Sonak underscored the importance of a transparent and proactive empanelment process that attracts competent and dedicated lawyers. Justice Sonak urged that State Legal Services Authorities should proactively reach out to Bar Associations and Chambers to identify capable and socially committed lawyers, rather than rely solely on public advertisements. Justice Sonak on his experience in Goa and Maharashtra, observed that transparency was not a major concern, but the appointment of capable lawyers remained a pressing issue.

Justice Sonak noted the coexistence of two realities—thousands of capable young lawyers struggling to establish their practice due to limited resources, and countless litigants unable to afford legal representation. Justice Sonak emphasized that bridging this gap, must be a central mission of the legal aid system.

Emphasizing that the true motivation for joining legal aid must be the honour of service rather than remuneration alone Justice Sonak called for renewed focus on diversity, inclusivity and capacity-building. Justice Sonak observed that legal aid provides not only professional experience but also deep personal fulfilment, equipping lawyers to become not just better professionals but better human beings. While recognizing that fair remuneration is essential, Justice Sonak cautioned against overemphasizing monetary rewards, referring to the theory of *“motivation crowding”* to illustrate how financial incentives can sometimes undermine intrinsic commitment to public service.

Justice Sonak stressed the need to promote diversity and inclusivity, distinguishing between the two by saying that *“diversity is like being invited to a table, while inclusivity is a request to join in the dance.”* Representation

must include women, SC/ST and lawyers from marginalized communities across all panels.

Justice Sonak highlighted mentoring as a key area requiring renewed attention. Justice Sonak also highlighted that senior advocates should voluntarily devote time, perhaps once or twice a fortnight, to mentor younger Panel Lawyers. Mentoring, should take precedence over mere monitoring, which can be done electronically, as mentoring nurtures professional growth and institutional belonging.

Finally, Justice Sonak underscored the need for capacity building and continuous training in emerging areas such as cybercrime, psychology and international legal practices, so that Panel Lawyers are equipped for both current service and future professional growth.

Justice Nagarathna welcomed these observations, suggesting that at least 30% of Panel Lawyers across all jurisdictions should be women, and that dedicated consultation spaces within DLSA and TLSC offices be provided to Panel Lawyers to meet clients in a dignified and professional environment.

2. Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. Sam Koshy, Executive Chairperson, Telangana SLSA

Speaking on Panel Lawyers as the *"Backbone of Legal Aid,"* Justice Koshy reaffirmed that Article 39-A transforms legal aid from a matter of charity into a constitutional obligation of the State. Justice Koshy described Article 39-A as *"the soul of legal aid"*.

Justice Koshy traced the evolution of India's legal aid movement from the enactment of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, describing Panel Lawyers as its operational backbone.

Justice Koshy detailed how Panel Lawyers serve as the first line of defence for citizens. Justice Koshy highlighted that while Panel Lawyers were initially engaged limitedly, their role has since expanded to include civil, family, labour, welfare matters, and now extends beyond courtrooms to Lok Adalats, legal literacy campaigns and alternative dispute resolution initiatives. Justice Koshy observed that their work bridges the gap between the constitutional ideal of equal justice and its practical realization for millions of citizens.

Acknowledging that the honorarium rarely reflects the effort involved, Justice Koshy urged continued focus on recognition, training and

performance-based retention to ensure that legal aid is viewed as a legitimate and respected branch of professional practice rather than charity. Justice Koshy emphasized the need for professional integration, wherein legal aid work is treated as an integral part of the legal profession. Justice Koshy also advocated enhancing public awareness to dispel the misconception that legal aid equates to inferior representation.

In conclusion, Justice Koshy reaffirmed that the strength and success of India's legal aid framework depend upon its Panel Lawyers, whose commitment, competence and compassion transform the constitutional vision of Article 39-A into a living reality.

Justice Nagarathna appreciated Justice Koshy's emphasis on Panel Lawyers as the "backbone" of legal aid and proposed that Senior Advocates in each High Court be empanelled to assist in complex or appellate cases, to strengthen the professional ecosystem and mentorship culture.

FINAL REMARKS

During the interactive segment, a participant proposed reserving weekly time slots in court rosters exclusively for legal aid cases to encourage visibility and timely disposal. Justice Nagarathna appreciated the idea but clarified that scheduling remains within the prerogative of the *Master of the Roster*.

Justice Nagarathna, in her concluding remarks, endorsed the suggestions from the panel and lauded Punjab and Haryana's higher fee structures as an encouraging benchmark. Justice Nagarathna reiterated that prompt and staged honorarium disbursal could incentivize performance and accountability.

Justice Nagarathna thanked all panellists for their "*practical and heartfelt contributions*" and underscored that the strength of our organization lies in ensuring "*quality legal aid to every deserving citizen*".

The session concluded with a vote of thanks by the Moderator, Ms. Amandeep Sibia, who expressed gratitude to the Hon'ble panel for their insightful deliberations and appreciated the active participation of the audience.

WORKING SESSION III
EMPOWERING PARA LEGAL VOLUNTEERS (PLVS):
BUILDING COMPETENCE AND COMMUNITY REACH
8TH NOVEMBER, 2025, 12:45 PM TO 02:00 PM

Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. M. Sundresh, Judge, Supreme Court of India

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harish Tandon, Chief Justice, High Court of Orissa

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. S. Ramachandra Rao, Chief Justice, High Court of Tripura

Speaker 1: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta, Executive Chairperson, Uttar Pradesh State Legal Services Authority

Speaker 2: Hon'ble Mr. Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque, Executive Chairperson, Kerala & Lakshadweep State Legal Services Authorities

Moderator: Ms. Shreya Arora Mehta, District Judge, Delhi/
Officer on Special Duty, NALSA

INTRODUCTION OF THE SESSION
BY THE MODERATOR

The moderator introduced the session by highlighting that the purpose of this Working Session is to facilitate a solution-oriented dialogue among Hon'ble Dignitaries and senior functionaries of the Legal Services Institutions to identify actionable strategies for strengthening the Para Legal Volunteer (PLV) cadre.

Legal Services Institutions across the country presently have a total strength of 48,380 PLVs, comprising 27,641 males, 20,594 females, and 145 transgender persons. Together, they form the backbone of India's legal aid system, serving as grassroots intermediaries bridging the gap between marginalized citizens and the formal justice system. PLVs serve as the human interface between citizens and legal services institutions. Thus, translating the constitutional mandate of "Access to Justice for All" under Article 39A of the Constitution of India into a lived reality.

The moderator outlined the statutory & institutional framework for PLVs derives from *the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987*, *the National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010*, and *the National Legal Services Authority (Legal Services Clinics) Regulations*,

2011, the NALSA's Scheme for Para Legal Volunteers, 2012, as well as Module for Training of Para-Legal Volunteers, Manual for District Legal Services Authorities, 2023 and Handbook of Formats: Ensuring Effective Legal Services. Section 4(l) of the Act empowers the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) to undertake appropriate measures for spreading legal literacy and legal awareness, forming the statutory basis for community outreach through PLVs. The NALSA's Scheme for PLVs, formulated in 2009 and revised in 2012, provides a framework for their selection, training, deployment and monitoring by State, District and Taluk Legal Services Authorities. It lays down the eligibility criteria for PLVs: every PLV must be a citizen of India and at least a matriculate. This eligibility goes beyond education – it is rooted in compassion, empathy, and commitment to social service.

It was noted that PLVs come from diverse socio-professional backgrounds including teachers, retired government servants, senior citizens, social workers, Anganwadi workers, healthcare professionals, students, prisoners. Trained inmates – both convicts and undertrials – also serve as PLVs within prisons. Each volunteer contributes through their ability to listen, counsel, and stand by those in need with humility and hope.

The training of PLVs, as emphasized, is structured and continuous, comprising orientation, induction, refresher courses, and field exposure in courts, police stations, prisons, district magistrate offices, and legal aid clinics.

PLVs perform a wide range of duties – promoting legal awareness, assisting in legal aid clinics and front offices, facilitating access to government schemes, referring disputes to mediation and Lok Adalats, and organizing legal literacy programs in schools, colleges, and communities. As of August 2025, PLVs are deployed in over 9,000 police stations, 2,000 front offices, and 2,400 prisons, in addition to 288 observation homes, 974 Juvenile Justice Boards and 451 other child-care institutions. To enhance service quality, panels of experienced mentors are constituted who guide PLVs in handling complex cases and developing professional skills.

The Moderator further noted recent advancements wherein the eligibility framework has been expanded to include ex-servicemen/defence families (under the NALSA Veer Parivar Sahayata Yojana) and retired forest guards (under the NALSA Scheme on Access to Justice for Victims of Human-Wildlife Conflict), reflecting NALSA's commitment to building a skilled, context-responsive and community-trusted volunteer base.

As NALSA enters its fourth decade, the moderator explained that the theme of this Working Session is both timely and crucial. At a time when access to justice is being redefined through technology, community outreach, and integration with social welfare frameworks, it becomes imperative to strengthen PLVs with deeper competence, sharper skills, and wider reach, so that they can effectively transform legal literacy into tangible access to justice. The broad theme was stipulated thereupon:

- 1. Selection and Training of PLVs: Building A Strong Cadre-** To ensure transparent & community-based selection of PLVs, prioritizing commitment to service, empathy & integrity and structured and continuous training, including orientation, induction and refresher programmes, scheme-specific and field-based training and performance guidance.
- 2. Deployment and Utilisation of PLVs: From Courts to Communities-** To ensure meaningful deployment of PLVs in legal aid clinics, front offices of DLSAs/TLSCs, police stations, prisons, juvenile justice institutions, community outreach, and door-to-door legal awareness initiatives.
- 3. Recognition, Incentives & Monitoring: Sustaining PLVs for the Future-** To institutionalize mechanisms for recognition, incentives, continuous monitoring and mentoring of PLVs, ensuring accountability and to retain committed volunteers for the long-term impact.

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE M. M. SUNDRESH
JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA**

Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. M. Sundresh, Judge, Supreme Court of India, reflected upon the constitutional basis of legal aid, drawing attention to Article 39A of the Constitution, read in conjunction with the Preamble. His Lordship underscored that the right to free legal aid and access to justice is not a matter of charity or discretion, but a constitutional obligation integral to realising the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

His Lordship described Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) as the “*foot soldiers in a war*”, observing that the success of legal rights and welfare schemes depends greatly on how effectively they are communicated and implemented at the grassroots. The need for continuous empowerment and competence-building among PLVs was underscored, noting that their

training should go beyond imparting basic legal knowledge and emphasised that training must be ongoing, interactive and feedback-driven, enabling authorities to adapt to emerging needs.

Justice Sundresh noted that the ambit of PLVs has commendably expanded from being limited to teachers to now encompassing students, senior citizens, Anganwadi workers, health workers, ex-servicemen and individuals from diverse walks of life. However, his Lordship cautioned that effective implementation requires addressing issues such as the digital divide, remuneration, motivation and due recognition of PLVs' contributions.

Calling for the creation of a robust and continuously reviewed system, his Lordship emphasized that strengthening and refining the existing institutional framework is essential for improving the functioning of the State machinery. He further suggested exploring a structured categorization of PLVs, dividing them into two levels or groups, to instil a sense of pride, purpose, and permanency in their service.

REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIRS

1. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE HARISH TANDON, CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF ORISSA

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harish Tandon, Chief Justice, High Court of Orissa, reflected upon the evolution of the legal aid movement in India, tracing its roots to the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, which laid the foundation for the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. His Lordship observed that the concept of Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs), as envisioned by NALSA through its *Scheme for Implementing the Project of Para-Legal Volunteers by the State Legal Services Authorities, 2009*, gave practical expression to the noble idea of engaging altruists to partner in the humanitarian endeavour of uplifting the socio-legal rights of the poor, the wark, and the marginalized.

Justice Tandon described PLVs as "*Adhikar Mitras*", emphasizing that their role is to elevate the status of the poor and the marginalized, while creating vital linkage between citizens' rights and welfare schemes. And emphasized that PLVs are not merely tasked with spreading legal awareness, but also with ensuring that citizens are informed of their fundamental rights, available legal aid services, and welfare entitlements. They serve as a crucial link between citizens and legal services institutions, assisting in pre-litigation counselling, documenting, the functioning of prison legal aid clinics, and community outreach.

To illustrate their impact, his Lordship cited inspiring examples of PLVs from Odisha who have brought tangible change to people's lives. In one instance, a PLV from Kendrapara District assisted a physically disabled elderly person in obtaining his old-age pension and benefits under the Antyodaya Gramin Yojana, thereby transforming his living conditions. In another case, a PLV from Cuttack organized 47 awareness camps, facilitated the registration of 415 unorganized labourers, secured death and marriage certificates for several families, and helped senior citizens and differently-abled persons access welfare schemes. Justice Tandon lauded such exemplary efforts, acknowledging that PLVs truly embody the spirit of service and inclusivity envisioned under the NALSA framework.

At the same time, he drew attention to key challenges confronting the PLV system, including inadequate remuneration, lack of structured training and monitoring mechanisms, and the absence of clear role demarcation between PLVs, legal aid counsels and other volunteers.

To address these issues, Justice Tandon recommended the creation of peer-learning groups, regular sharing of field experiences, clear role demarcation, and structured, domain-specific training modules to build competence and morale. His Lordship stressed the need for digital integration through mobile applications and online portals to streamline reporting and coordination. And highlighted the importance of psychological and social support systems for PLVs who often face emotional strain in their field engagements.

In conclusion, Justice Tandon underscored that strengthening, protecting, and empowering PLVs is indispensable to realizing the constitutional vision of a welfare-oriented justice delivery system. If the nation is committed to eradicating ignorance, building capability, and ensuring institutionalized access to justice, PLVs must be valued, trained, incentivized, and upheld as key partners in advancing inclusive justice for all.

2. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE M. S. RAMACHANDRA RAO, CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF TRIPURA

Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. S. Ramachandra Rao, Chief Justice, High Court of Tripura, emphasized that the primary purpose of PLVs is to demystify the law at the grassroots level and act as community anchors who bridge the gap between vulnerable citizens and the formal justice system. His Lordship observed that PLVs play a vital role in guiding individuals through police stations, courts, government offices and welfare schemes.

Referring to the Concept Note circulated by NALSA, Justice Rao elaborated upon several key thematic areas of discussion. On the issue of specialized training and scheme linkages, his lordship endorsed the idea of scheme-specific micro-training for PLVs, but noted that given the diversity across India, each State Legal Services Authority (SLSA), in consultation with the District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs), should design training content tailored to local needs rather than follow a uniform national model. Justice Rao observed that this would ensure more effective outreach and targeted assistance to marginalized groups.

On the aspect of mapping PLVs to local scheme needs and tracking outreach, Justice Rao recommended that NALSA may consider developing a centralized portal or mobile application to be operated at all levels of legal services institutions for recording and monitoring the specialized work of PLVs nationwide. Such a system could include PLVs' contact details, areas of operation, skill sets, familiarity with local communities, types of services rendered, and measurable outcomes. Justice Rao further recommended that SLSAs prepare state-specific schemes and need-based programmes, with NALSA's approval, and promote coordinated collaboration among PLVs, local authorities, and community stakeholders. Justice Rao emphasized that regular review meetings, monitoring, performance evaluations, and capacity-building programs at both SLSA and DLSA levels are essential to sustaining quality in service delivery.

Justice Rao spoke extensively on the importance of digital infrastructure and ICT training for PLVs, observing that technology is indispensable for improving efficiency and responsiveness. He proposed that PLVs be given access to computers and internet facilities at village or block-level legal aid clinics, enabling them to log cases, track progress, submit reports, and communicate with mentors or duty lawyers in real time. Justice Rao noted that DLSAs are best placed to assess local needs and determine the feasibility of such digital tools, while SLSAs may provide feedback to NALSA for examining funding for digital facilities and reimbursement of internet expenses.

Further, Justice Rao underscored the importance of integrating PLVs with e-courts and online welfare systems. Training should be imparted on the use of e-Court portals, e-filing tools, video conferencing, and various welfare scheme portals, with preference given to candidates possessing basic computer literacy. Justice Rao suggested that e-Courts Committees of High Courts take the lead in organizing such programs. Justice Rao also

emphasized that legal aid clinics and Common Service Centres (CSCs) must be equipped with internet connectivity, computers, and printers to ensure smooth implementation.

His Lordship emphasized the need to cultivate empathy, neutrality, and effective communication among PLVs. Justice Rao stated that PLVs must be trained to handle sensitive cases with compassion and professionalism, maintain neutrality, and uphold the confidentiality of those seeking their assistance. For this purpose, Justice Rao proposed refining the selection process to identify individuals genuinely motivated by public service. Justice Rao also suggested the formulation of a National Code of Conduct for PLVs, incorporating principles of non-partisanship, confidentiality, and accountability to enhance credibility and public trust.

Further, his lordship addressed the importance of timely honorarium payments, certification, awards and formal recognition, as significant motivators for PLVs. Drawing attention to the challenges faced by PLVs in securing cooperation from government officials, Justice Rao noted that the lack of official status often hampers their functioning. To address this, Justice Rao recommended that each SLSA engage with State administrative departments at the Secretary level to facilitate the issuance of official circulars requesting cooperation with PLVs. Justice Rao observed that this would ease PLVs' interaction with authorities in departments such as social welfare, police, and health, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in serving the public.

VIEW OF THE HON'BLE SPEAKERS

1. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE MANOJ KUMAR GUPTA, EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON, UTTAR PRADESH STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta, Executive Chairperson, Uttar Pradesh State Legal Services Authority (UP SLSA), reaffirmed that PLVs occupy a unique position within the legal services framework, serving as the bridge between the justice system and the common man. Echoing the observations of Justice Sundresh, his Lordship acknowledged that PLVs are the first responders of justice, who perform multiple roles such as educators, mediators, counsellors and empathetic listeners to those in distress.

Justice Gupta noted that since the launch of the NALSA's *Scheme for Implementing the Project of Para-Legal Volunteers by the State Legal Services*

Authorities in 2009, the initiative has made remarkable progress over the last 15 years. However, his Lordship pointed out that systemic improvements are now essential to address existing gaps and strengthen the functioning of PLVs.

Drawing from practical experiences in Uttar Pradesh, his Lordship shared several innovative measures and best practices adopted at the State level. *Firstly*, he highlighted a critical issue of institutional recognition – that PLVs often face resistance or non-cooperation from administrative authorities and police officials due to the lack of formal acknowledgment of their role. To address this, UP SLSA coordinated with the Principal Secretary (Home) to circulate a list of registered PLVs to all police stations across the State. This ensured that when PLVs visit any authority with identification card, they are formally recognized and permitted to assist individuals in need. *Secondly*, his Lordship emphasized the importance of continuous training to truly empower PLVs. While acknowledging NALSA's existing training modules, Justice Gupta proposed periodic updates and enrichment of content to include new developments in social welfare legislations, government schemes and community-level challenges. To strengthen training, he shared an innovative digital initiative from Uttar Pradesh – the launch of an AI-driven chatbot “Nyaymarg” on 2nd November for Android users. The tool enables both PLVs and citizens to access legal information and guidance in simple language. Initially available in Hindi, He informed that regional language support such as Bundelkhandi, Awadhi and Brajbhasha will be integrated in the next phase to expand its accessibility and outreach. *Thirdly*, his Lordship underscored the value of a structured mentorship system for newly inducted PLVs. He observed that despite training, new volunteers often lack practical exposure. To bridge this gap he suggested pairing them with experienced PLVs or with retired judicial officers willing to serve as mentors. And such mentorship would provide essential guidance on procedures, best practices and effective community engagement. *Lastly*, he emphasized the need for digital empowerment, recommending that PLVs be equipped with mobile phones or laptops to facilitate their work. He shared that the UPSLSA has already provided mobile devices to Process Servers, and expressed confidence that extending similar facilities, with NALSA's approvals, to PLVs, would significantly enhance their efficiency and connectivity.

2. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE A. MUHAMED MUSTAQUE, EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON, KERALA & LAKSHADWEEP STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITIES

Hon'ble Mr. Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque, Executive Chairperson, Kerala & Lakshadweep State Legal Services Authority, emphasized that while discourse on legal aid often centers around the formal justice system of courts, judges, and lawyers, a vast segment of the population remains excluded from its benefits. Referring to data from the World Justice Project, Justice Mustaque observed that many people perceive the formal justice system as inaccessible or unaffordable, underscoring the importance of informal justice mechanisms where PLVs play a vital role.

His Lordship stressed that PLVs must be selected not for legal service but for social service, as they serve the community, not as employees but as volunteers guided by empathy and commitment. Influenced by Halterman's principles, he highlighted the need to clearly distinguish legal functions from social duties, ensuring that PLVs remain facilitators of justice rather than regular functionaries.

His Lordship further underlined the need for scheme-specific and project-oriented training for PLVs. Citing Kerala's initiatives such as the Victim Rights Centre, Project SAMVADA, Child Legal Assistance Program (CLAP), Family Counselling Centres, the SAMAYAM Scheme, and the HARMONY HUB, Justice Mustaque noted that each project demands PLVs with specialized knowledge and training beyond general orientation. His Lordship also shared that Kerala SLSA has introduced the *Model PLV Performance Analysis Guidelines 2025*, a ten-parameter evaluation system categorizing PLVs from A (Excellent) to D (Poor), to ensure accountability, recognition, and ongoing improvement.

In the end, his Lordship emphasised upon the importance of digital integration, citing the Mobile e-Sewa Kendra initiative in Idukki District, where PLVs use this facility to collect grievances, connect citizens to the High Court and record data in real time. He noted that such digital convergence between PLVs and e-Sewa Kendras can greatly enhance access to justice, particularly in rural and marginalized regions.

INTERACTIVE SESSION

1. An advocate from DLSA Satara, Maharashtra, suggested revising NALSA's Training Modules for PLVs to incorporate updates on recent legal developments, cyber laws, crimes against women, and technical skills, along with the appointment of mentors or nodal officers to provide continuous guidance and supervision.

The Hon'ble Chair, Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. M. Sundresh, endorsed the suggestion and emphasized the importance of region-specific training that addresses local challenges and community needs.

2. A PLV from DLSA Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, highlighted various challenges faced during outreach activities.

The Hon'ble Speaker, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta, Executive Chairperson, UP SLISA, clarified that PLVs are provided a daily conveyance allowance of ₹150, in addition to their honorarium, to facilitate their outreach work.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

In his concluding address, Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.M. Sundresh noted a clear consensus among the panellists on the need to strengthen the PLV framework by fostering a sense of pride, ensuring better coordination with agencies and expanding their digital and social capacities. His Lordship emphasized that PLVs serve as a vital link between citizens, the justice system, and welfare institutions, and should therefore be empowered through technological tools, localized and project-based training, and continuous engagement with administrative and judicial authorities. He concluded by expressing confidence that the valuable insights and recommendations shared during the session would shape and strengthen future initiatives aimed at fortifying the legal aid delivery system.

RECOMMENDATIONS/WAY FORWARD

The views shared and discussed during the Session led to the articulation of the following recommendations for improving access to legal aid across the country:

1. Selection Process

Refine PLV selection processes to prioritize candidates motivated by public service, empathy, neutrality, confidentiality, non-partisanship, and accountability.

2. Training and Capacity Building

- Develop structured, scheme-specific, interactive, and feedback-based training modules that go beyond basic legal literacy and include exposure to evolving laws, social welfare schemes, and digital tools.

- Conduct periodic capacity-building programs, review meetings, and performance evaluations to sustain quality in service delivery.
- Pair newly inducted PLVs with experienced volunteers or retired judicial officers to provide guidance on procedures, best practices, and effective community engagement.

3. Operational Framework

- Establish a robust, periodically reviewed framework for PLV management, including structured categorization to provide permanency, accountability, and professional identity.
- Define clear responsibilities between PLVs and legal aid counsels to ensure efficient coordination and avoid overlap of functions.
- Implement structured evaluation systems (e.g., Model PLV Performance Analysis Guidelines 2025) with clear parameters to categorize PLVs, recognize excellence, and guide ongoing improvement.
- Prepare state-specific schemes and need-based programs to address regional requirements effectively.

4. Digital Enablement and Tools

- Provide PLVs with access to computers, internet, e-Courts, and welfare scheme portals, along with training on e-filing, video conferencing, and online case tracking. Equip legal aid clinics and Common Services Centers with necessary digital tools.
- Introduce mobile applications and online portals to streamline reporting, coordination, and monitoring, thereby improving transparency and operational efficiency.
- Promote digital tools like AI-driven chatbots and regional language support to provide legal information and guidance to both PLVs and citizens.
- Leverage platforms such as Mobile e-Sewa Kendras to enable PLVs to record grievances, connect citizens with courts, and collect real-time data, enhancing accessibility and efficiency.

5. Motivation, Recognition, and Welfare

- Ensure timely honorarium payments, certification, awards, and formal recognition to sustain PLVs' engagement and morale.
- Establish support systems to address the emotional and psychological strain faced by PLVs in the course of their community engagements.

6. Collaboration and Outreach

- Promote collaboration among PLVs, local authorities, and community stakeholders.
- Engage with State administrative departments at the Secretary level to issue circulars directing cooperation with PLVs, easing their interactions with departments such as social welfare, police, and health.
- Ensure formal acknowledgment of PLVs' role by administrative authorities and police departments, including circulation of registered PLV lists to all relevant offices to facilitate cooperation.
- Take proactive measures to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that PLVs in remote or underserved areas have equitable access to resources and support.

WORKING SESSION IV
STRENGTHENING PERMANENT LOK ADALATS (PLAS):
REACH, REGULARITY & RESPONSIVENESS
9TH NOVEMBER, 2025, 10:00 AM TO 11:15 AM

Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Pamidighantam Sri Narasimha, Judge, Supreme Court of India

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Gurmeet Singh Sandhawalia, Chief Justice, High Court of Himachal Pradesh

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya, Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi

Speaker 1: Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Lisa Gill, Executive Chairperson, Haryana State Legal Services Authority

Speaker 2: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Alpesh Y. Kogje, Executive Chairperson, Gujarat State Legal Services Authority

Moderator: Ms. Shreya Arora Mehta, District Judge, Delhi/
Officer on Special Duty, NALSA

INTRODUCTION OF THE SESSION
BY THE MODERATOR

The moderator introduced the session by highlighting that the purpose of this Working Session is to facilitate a solution-oriented dialogue among Hon'ble Dignitaries and senior functionaries of the Legal Services Institutions to identify actionable strategies for strengthening the reach, regularity and responsiveness of Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs).

Legal Services Institutions across the country presently have a total of 382 functional PLAs operating under the Legal Services Authorities framework to resolve disputes relating to public utility services. These institutions embody the spirit of access to justice by providing a statutory mechanism for pre-litigation conciliation and adjudication. They reflect a paradigm shift from adversarial litigation to a conciliatory approach aimed at resolving disputes in a cost-effective and time-bound manner.

The moderator outlined the statutory & institutional framework governing PLAs is rooted in *the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987* and *the Permanent Lok Adalat (Other Terms and Conditions of Appointment of Chairman and Other Person) Rules, 2003*, as recently amended by Amendment Rules of

2025. Sections 22A to 22E under Chapter VIA of the Act provide the foundation for PLAs, outlining their establishment, powers, and procedures. The 2003 Rules specify the tenure, sitting fee, terms of appointment of Chairmen and Members, as well as the frequency of sittings.

It was noted that Permanent Lok Adalats adjudicate disputes pertaining to public utility services such as transport service, telephone service, supply of electricity & water, public sanitation, service in hospital, insurance service, educational as well as housing & real estate service – each representing citizens' everyday interaction with right to live life with dignity.

A key distinction between Lok Adalats and Permanent Lok Adalats, as underscored, is that the Lok Adalat acts purely as a conciliation forum and has no power to decide on merits while a Permanent Lok Adalat has a dual role – it first attempts conciliation; if it fails, it can adjudicate on merits.

At present, PLAs are operational in 22 States and Union Territories, while 15 States and Union Territories are yet to establish them. Across India, there are 289 serving Chairmen and 593 Members in PLAs, with 98 Chairmen posts and 181 Member posts lying vacant in 16 States and Union Territories.

The moderator further emphasized that over the past decade, the number of cases settled has increased from 93,000 in 2016–17 to over 2.37 lakh in 2024–25. Between January and August 2025, PLAs across the country conducted 22,791 sittings, receiving 1.78 lakh cases and settling 1.48 lakh disputes, with a total settlement value exceeding ₹1,563 crore. The data also reflects that some States hold over 400 sittings per month, while others hold only 2-3 sittings per month, with settlement rates ranging from as high as 83% in some jurisdictions to below 10% in others.

As NALSA enters its fourth decade, the moderator explained that the theme of this Working Session underscores the need to expand PLA coverage across all jurisdictions, to enhance their operational consistency, and to ensure timely, citizen-centric responsiveness. Strengthening PLAs in dimensions of reach, regularity and responsiveness is essential so as to ensure that PLA remain accessible, disputes are resolved swiftly, and justice becomes a tangible reality for all. The broad theme was stipulated thereupon:

1. **Expanding Reach of PLAs-** To strengthen the framework of PLAs by expanding their reach across all States and Union Territories, ensuring coverage of every public utility service, and enhancing public awareness.
2. **Enhancing Responsiveness of PLAs-** To make PLAs more people-centric, responsive, and trusted through continuous capacity-building

and training of Chairmen & Members in mediation, conciliation, and public utility laws.

3. **Ensuring Regularity in Operations-** To maintain the regularity, efficiency, and integrity of PLAs through regular sittings, timely appointments, continuous monitoring and integration of technology for transparent, swift, and accessible dispute resolution.

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE PAMIDIGHANTAM SRI NARASIMHA
JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. S. Narasimha, Judge, Supreme Court of India highlighted the dual role of Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs), wherein they initially attempt conciliation, and if that fails, they are empowered to adjudicate the dispute on merits without the constraints of precedent. His Lordship emphasized that one of the key features of PLAs lies in their cost-effectiveness, as they operate without significantly impacting the State exchequer. His Lordship observed that, with minor amendments, PLAs could incorporate greater participation of lawyers, which would be especially valuable given the low judge-to-population ratio in India.

Drawing on his experience with the Srikrishna Committee, his Lordship reflected on broader challenges in institutional functioning. His Lordship contrasted PLAs with arbitration and mediation, noting that while arbitration often lacks structured institutional support, and mediation remains underdeveloped in terms of organized infrastructure, PLAs benefit from the advantage of statutory incorporation. This institutionalization, his Lordship emphasized, enables systematic monitoring and accountability, thereby distinguishing PLAs from *ad hoc* dispute resolution mechanisms.

His Lordship cautioned against perceiving PLAs merely as alternatives to formal courts or as tools for reducing High Court dockets. Instead, his Lordship urged participants to recognize PLAs as independent institutions capable of delivering transformative justice. His Lordship underscored the critical role of PLAs in addressing district-level disputes that directly affect people's everyday lives, areas often overshadowed by the focus on commercial arbitration. His Lordship further stressed that the accessibility and procedural simplicity of PLAs make them particularly well-suited to serve citizens who might otherwise find it difficult to engage with the formal justice system.

His Lordship also pointed out that even when statutory bodies are constituted, their constitution is often impaired by delays in appointments and inadequate monitoring. Similar challenges exist for PLAs, with some states lacking Permanent Lok Adalats altogether, while others suffer from vacancies and irregular monitoring. His Lordship emphasized that addressing these institutional gaps is essential for realizing the full potential of PLAs as effective and inclusive forums for dispute resolution.

REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIRS

1. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE GURMEET SINGH SANDHAWALIA, CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Gurmeet Singh Sandhawalia, Chief Justice, High Court of Himachal Pradesh, emphasized that the guiding spirit of Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs) lies in the constitutional mandate enshrined under Article 39A. Drawing upon the Concept Note, his Lordship highlighted three key parameters essential for strengthening PLAs – Reach, Regularity, and Responsiveness – and proposed the addition of a fourth, Results, as a measure of their effectiveness.

His Lordship elaborated that the scope of PLAs encompasses disputes concerning public utility services which directly affect citizens' daily lives, including transport services, postal and telegraph services, water supply, sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries, insurance, education, housing, and real estate. Describing these as “the common man's everyday problems,” his Lordship observed that PLAs must be reimagined as People's Liberation Adalats – institutions that empower citizens by providing accessible, affordable, and expeditious justice.

Citing the example of Punjab, where ten additional services such as issuance of Aadhaar Card, Ration Cards, Voter Identity Cards, BPL Cards, old-age and widow pensions, the Shagun Scheme, unemployment allowances, services under the public distribution system, registration of births and deaths, vehicle registration, and driving licenses have been notified as public utility services, his Lordship urged all States to broadening the ambit of PLAs to include such everyday public service issues.

Referring to recent data trends, his Lordship observed that annual disposals under PLAs have nearly doubled – from about one lakh cases in 2018–19 to over 2.37 lakh cases in 2024–25. However, his Lordship noted that 15 States still do not have functional PLAs, including major jurisdictions such as

Gujarat and West Bengal, as well as several from the North-East. His Lordship shared that Himachal Pradesh had adopted a hybrid system from 2007 to 2019, under which officers at major stations who were handling matters before the Consumer Forums were also entrusted with the work of PLAs.

His Lordship further analysed State-wise variations in performance, citing data that revealed wide disparities in settlement and its value. For instance, while Haryana recorded 52,800 settlements worth ₹29 crore, Karnataka reported settlements valued at ₹119 crore, whereas Jharkhand, despite settling 22,000 cases, recorded a settlement value of ₹79 crore – reflecting differences in case nature and efficiency. His Lordship also pointed out that Uttar Pradesh conducted the highest number of PLA sittings at 10,248, followed by Jharkhand with 4,908 sittings, primarily due to the larger number of functional PLAs in those States. Similarly, Punjab recorded 3,443 sittings and Rajasthan 3,220. His Lordship observed that these figures warrant detailed analysis to understand their composition and the factors contributing to efficiency or underperformance. His Lordship further highlighted that settlement rates also varied widely across States – from as high as 74.9% in Haryana to as low as 8.78% in Uttar Pradesh – underscoring the need for systematic evaluation to identify reasons for low disposal in certain jurisdictions.

Addressing the issue of vacancies, his Lordship observed that States such as Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Odisha, Bihar, and Punjab continue to face significant shortfalls in the appointment of Chairmen and Members, thereby impairing institutional functioning. His Lordship noted that with a robust appointment and monitoring system in place, the efficiency and reach of PLAs could be substantially enhanced. His Lordship further pointed out that over the past decade, approximately 13,11,345 cases were settled out of 14,25,119 received, though a pendency of over one lakh cases remains. His Lordship remarked that, in effect, nearly 25 lakh cases that might otherwise have entered the formal judicial system were resolved through Permanent Lok Adalats.

Sharing his experience from Punjab, his Lordship observed that active monitoring and evaluation mechanisms had led to significant improvement in disposal rates and emphasized the need for similar systematic oversight across all States.

2. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE DEVENDRA KUMAR UPADHYAYA, CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF DELHI

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya, Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi, observed that the system of Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs) remains significantly underutilized and its transformative potential is yet to be fully realized. His Lordship emphasized that PLAs, as envisaged under the Legal Services Authorities Act, are meant to ensure access to justice in matters relating to public utility services. While certain services are already enumerated under the Act, his Lordship pointed out that additional services may easily be included through a simple notification by the Government or the State Legal Services Authorities, thereby expanding the reach of PLAs to cover a broader range of citizen-centric issues.

His Lordship stressed that PLAs should not be perceived merely as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms but as primary institutions for resolving disputes related to public utility services. Drawing attention to the growing number of writ petitions filed under Article 226 of the Constitution in High Courts for issues such as sanitation, drainage, and other civic concerns, his Lordship highlighted that these matters could be effectively resolved through a strengthened and responsive PLA system.

Focusing on practical challenges of institutional functioning, his Lordship observed that most PLAs are presently chaired by retired judicial officers, who often approach the role as a post-retirement engagement. Citing the example of Uttar Pradesh, where PLAs have been constituted in 71 districts but disposal rates remain low, his Lordship underscored the need to appoint Chairmen & Members who are proactive, empathetic, and passionate about social justice delivery rather than those in a retirement mode. His Lordship urged all SLSAs to adopt a more discerning and sensitive approach in making such appointments to ensure that PLAs are manned by persons motivated by commitment and public service.

His Lordship further explained that the PLA mechanism operates as a “multi-engine system” – initially through conciliation, where parties are encouraged to arrive at an amicable settlement; subsequently, by giving term of settlement to the parties and only thereafter, if conciliation fails, proceeding to adjudication on merits. This dual structure, his Lordship observed, renders PLAs an exceptionally effective and flexible mechanism, particularly for grievances concerning essential services such as sanitation, sewage, and civic amenities, where citizens often lack effective legal remedies and are compelled to approach High Courts.

His Lordship also highlighted that many disputes presently pending before Consumer Forums – including those relating to insurance, banking, and service deficiencies – could be expeditiously resolved by PLAs, thus alleviating the heavy caseload on consumer forums. His Lordship pointed out that certain public utility services, such as education-related issues (including coaching centres) and gas distribution systems, are not yet included but could be brought within the purview of PLAs through appropriate notifications issued by Governments or SLSAs.

His Lordship concluded by emphasizing two critical priorities for strengthening the PLA system: first, adopting a sensitive and merit-based approach in appointments to ensure passionate and capable leadership; and second, undertaking large-scale awareness campaigns to popularize PLAs so that citizens recognize them as permanent, accessible forums for resolving public utility service disputes – distinct from periodic Lok Adalats and integral to the everyday justice delivery framework.

Hon’ble Mr. Justice P. S. Narasimha, Chair of the Session emphasized that while the potential of PLAs must be fully realized and their jurisdictional width expanded, it is equally important first to consolidate and strengthen their existing functioning. His Lordship observed that before considering an expansion of scope, it is necessary to undertake a deep and systematic examination of the current operations of PLAs and ensure that they are functioning efficiently with respect to the work already entrusted to them. His Lordship underlined that only after achieving complete institutional stability and confidence in their existing processes should efforts be made to broaden their ambit and responsibilities.

His Lordship further highlighted the persistent challenge of manpower deficiency, particularly the difficulty in appointing retired District Judges to man the PLAs, and noted that it would be impractical to assign such responsibilities to sitting judges who already have full judicial workloads. In this context, his Lordship suggested involving actively engaging members of the Bar as part of their professional duty and participate in the functioning of PLAs for at least two sittings in a month.

VIEWS OF THE HON’BLE SPEAKERS

3. HON’BLE MR. JUSTICE HON’BLE MRS. JUSTICE LISA GILL, EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON, HARYANA STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Lisa Gill, Executive Chairperson, Haryana State Legal Services Authority opened her remarks with a reflective thought that the concept of justice dispensed "under a banyan tree by a congregation of respectables and elders" represented India's first true court of equity – where disputes were not won or lost, but resolved through fairness and understanding. Her Ladyship observed that the Permanent Lok Adalat (PLA) is a revival of this spirit – a fusion of ancient conciliatory wisdom and modern procedural innovation. Her Ladyship emphasized that access to justice must be more than a slogan; it must translate into real awareness and accessibility.

Her Ladyship focused on the aspects of Reach and Regularity of the Permanent Lok Adalats. Citing statistics, her Ladyship highlighted that out of 391 notified PLAs, 382 are functional, which indicates a 97.7% operational rate. However, only 22 States and Union Territories have at least one functional PLA, and PLAs exist in just 382 of India's 780 districts which is only half the country. Each existing PLA currently caters to an average of 3.7 million citizens, roughly double the desirable ratio. Therefore, her Ladyship highlighted the need to double the institutional presence to make justice truly accessible.

Her Ladyship noted that there is lack of public awareness. Even educated citizens remain unaware of the existence and functions of PLAs, often associating Lok Adalat only with traffic challan settlements. She stressed that ignorance about PLAs persists across both rural and urban populations, and therefore, Paralegal Volunteers (PLVs) play a pivotal role as ambassadors of justice – simplifying and humanizing the law for citizens. And shared the practice at Haryana State Legal Services Authority (HALSA), where an annual calendar is circulated in December to all District Legal Services Authorities, focusing on one area each month.

Her ladyship recommended that information about PLAs, their jurisdiction, and procedures be prominently displayed in public offices such as electricity boards, transport authorities, insurance companies, and banks, along with contact details of Legal Services Authorities. And suggested that legal literacy campaigns, media drives, and awareness programs must be sustained year-round to ensure that citizens are aware of the remedies available through PLAs.

The responsiveness of PLAs was illustrated with a recent example from Haryana, where a notification dated 4th April 2025 allowed the de-freezing of cybercrime-related funds under Sections 503 and 497 of the Bharatiya

Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 in cases where no FIR had been registered. This was a timely measure addressing the hardships faced by citizens in recovering their legitimate funds — an example of institutions adapting to contemporary realities.

Turning to regularity, her Ladyship observed that States where PLAs hold sittings regularly report settlement rates exceeding 70%, while those with sporadic sittings record less than 10%. And observed immediate steps must be taken to fill existing vacancies of Chairmen and Members, and States must expedite pending recommendations. Though, PLAs have still managed to settle 2.38 lakhs cases in 2024, 155% increase since the year 2017.

Her Ladyship commended the recent amendments regarding minimum meetings, enhancing honorarium and conveyance allowances and proposed that every PLA maintain a publicly displayed calendar, both physically at its premises and digitally on the NALSA MIS portal, to promote transparency and public confidence.

Her Ladyship cautioned that PLAs should not function as miniature courts. PLAs are forums for resolution, not rigid legal adjudication. Her Ladyship proposed considering a national framework for appointment, training, and performance evaluation to ensure uniform standards while allowing States to adapt to local realities.

Justice Gill also underscored the need for sensitization of Chairmen and Members regarding the scope of PLAs, citing instances where matters under the SARFAESI Act and service disputes had been entertained erroneously, leading to procedural complications. Concluding her remarks, her Ladyship noted that while substantial progress has been made, the journey towards strengthening PLAs continues. Her Ladyship emphasized the need to interweave awareness, accessibility, and accountability to make justice not just available, but meaningful and experiential.

Hon'ble Justice P. S. Narasimha, Chair of the Session, underlined two important facets — reach and regularity. The key word, his Lordship emphasized, is credibility, which must flow from effective monitoring and be firmly institutionalised.

4. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ALPESH Y. KOGJE, EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON, GUJARAT STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Justice Alpesh Y. Kogje began by highlighting Gujarat's pioneering role in the Lok Adalat movement, noting that the first-ever Lok Adalat in India was held

in Una, District Junagadh, on 14 March 1982. Continuing this legacy, a Permanent Lok Adalat named Visama was established in 2001 and remains operational even today. More recently, on 18 April 2023, the Chief Justice of Gujarat inaugurated UJAS, a Permanent Pre-Litigation Lok Adalat dedicated to matrimonial disputes.

His Lordship traced the conceptual foundation of the PLA to the Delhi High Court's decision in *Abdul Hasan and National Legal Services Authority v. Delhi Vidyut Board & Ors.*, (AIR 1999 Delhi 88), which recognized the need for specialized forums to resolve disputes concerning public utility services. His Lordship emphasized that PLAs have become increasingly relevant because public utilities and essential services are now integral to modern life, and ensuring uninterrupted access to them requires quick and effective dispute resolution. Over time, PLAs have emerged as a strong mechanism of Alternate Dispute Resolution; however, his Lordship observed that they must maintain a delicate balance – if they tilt towards Public Utility Services, they risk being perceived as recovery agents, and if they lean towards consumers, they risk being seen as customer care centres.

His Lordship stated that the responsiveness of the PLA is a two-way process — involving both the responsiveness of the public towards the PLA and the PLA's responsiveness towards the public and society. His Lordship identified certain statutory provisions that cause hesitation among stakeholders, particularly Section 22C(8) of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which allows the PLA to adjudicate when conciliation fails, and Section 22E(4), which makes its award final and subject only to challenge before the High Court. These provisions have led to the perception that even if conciliation fails even for the smallest reasons, parties will have to undergo the whole trial. However, his Lordship pointed out that the answer lies in Section 22D, which directs that PLA proceedings should not follow the lengthy procedures of the CPC or the Indian Evidence Act but should instead rely on principles of natural justice, objectivity, fair play, and equity. Decisions taken on these parameters, his Lordship stressed, are bound to be prompt and effective.

His Lordship further stated that enhancing the acceptability of PLAs would automatically improve their responsiveness. Citing the example of the mobile phone industry, his Lordship observed that mobile connectivity became widely accepted only after companies simplified access and payment processes. Similarly, PLAs must adopt innovative, user-friendly mechanisms such as online filing or mobile applications to increase accessibility for both parties.

His Lordship also presented a cost-efficiency analysis of PLAs based on the statistical data. His Lordship calculated that the conservative cost of running a PLA amount to around ₹17,000 per sitting. Comparing this with the number of sittings and cases settled, his Lordship observed that Haryana had the most cost-effective performance, with an average cost of ₹766 per case settled, followed by Delhi at around ₹500. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had higher costs per case — ₹1,10,895 and ₹1,06,000 respectively — while the national average stood at ₹2,650 per case. His Lordship suggested that discussions should now focus on rationalizing expenditure and optimizing resources to ensure better efficiency and outcomes.

Justice Kogje identified several obstacles affecting the responsiveness of PLAs, including the perception that PLAs function like regular courts, the closing down of an option to revert back to mainstream litigation, apprehensions among PSU officers that conciliatory commitments might affect their careers, limited public awareness about PLAs, and not so user-friendly process to approach PLA. To address these, his Lordship proposed several measures: creating easy and user-friendly access through dedicated software or mobile apps; ensuring strict adherence to Section 22D of the Act by emphasizing natural justice, objectivity, fair play and equity over technicalities; organizing joint meetings between PLAs, SLSAs, and PSU heads to foster participation; providing mediation training for PLA members and PSU officers; and integrating Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) in awareness campaigns to enhance outreach.

Appreciating his insights, **Justice P. S. Narasimha** observed that Section 22B of the Act encapsulates Parliament's caution that justice should not be complicated but simplified — to ensure it is delivered as swiftly and easily as possible.

INTERACTIVE SESSION

1. **Hon'ble Mr. Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh, Judge, High Court of Telangana**, shared his insights drawn from his experience in Jharkhand, emphasizing practical measures that can strengthen the functioning of existing PLAs. His Lordship highlighted that vacancies in the post of Chairman often arise due to transfers or appointments of incumbents to other forums such as District Consumer Commissions or Electricity Forums. To ensure continuity, his Lordship suggested that additional charge may be temporarily assigned to neighbouring districts and that virtual hearings may be conducted to avoid disruptions.

His Lordship further mentioned that in Jharkhand, the banking sector was brought within the ambit of PLAs, and the concept of camp PLAs was successfully implemented. Under this model, PLAs held sittings at branch offices of banks or insurance companies, where notices were served directly through these institutions, enabling quick and effective resolution of disputes.

His Lordship also highlighted a procedural concern: since matters pending before a PLA cannot be simultaneously taken before regular courts, it becomes crucial that PLAs dispose of cases expeditiously to prevent prolonged pendency. His Lordship cautioned that extended delays could effectively bar parties from instituting regular suits.

Justice P. S. Narasimha, the Hon'ble Chair, appreciated the suggestions, noting that all Legal Services Institutions are grappling with similar challenges.

2. **Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ashutosh Kumar, Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court and Patron-in-Chief, Assam SLISA**, highlighted that instead of merely monitoring disputes under the Permanent Lok Adalats, the focus has been on monitoring the functioning of the system itself. His Lordship shared his experience from Patna, where during his tenure as Acting Chief Justice, the mechanism worked very effectively. His Lordship noted that outcomes often depend on the nature of cases before the Lok Adalats and the manner in which they are handled.

His Lordship recalled guiding PLA Chairmen & Members on effective conciliation, which made a substantial impact, leading to resolution of several contentious matters through more sittings and proactive conciliatory efforts. His Lordship emphasized that with proper training and experience, Lok Adalat judges begin to function much like respected village elders – appealing to the conscience of disputing parties rather than merely applying the law. His Lordship remarked that Lok Adalats can go a long way in building public trust and restoring faith in justice through empathy and moral persuasion.

3. **Mr. D. K. Bhende, Chairman, Permanent Lok Adalat, Nagpur, Maharashtra**, highlighted that although the State has 36 districts, only four Permanent Lok Adalats are presently established. He pointed out that the territorial jurisdiction of each Permanent Lok Adalat is currently confined to the district in which it is located. Expanding this territorial

jurisdiction, he suggested, would enable a larger number of litigants to access justice through this mechanism. Further, referring to Section 11 of the SARFAESI Act, he proposed that if disputes arising under this Act are brought within the ambit of public utility services, it would allow more litigants to benefit from the forum of Permanent Lok Adalats.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Shree Chandrashekhar, Chief Justice, Bombay High Court and Patron-in-Chief, Maharashtra SLA, responded that the suggestion has been duly noted. His Lordship assured that the Authority is already taking steps in this direction and has been conducting meetings with local stakeholders to address the issue.

4. **PLV from DLSA Chandigarh** shared a concern regarding delays in the disposal of cases before the Permanent Lok Adalats. Citing a past instance involving a waterlogging issue that took more than two years to resolve, the PLV suggested that cases before the Permanent Lok Adalats should ideally be decided within a fixed timeframe to encourage greater public participation and confidence in the system. The PLV further highlighted that in matters relating to public grievances, such as those raised at Sampark Centres for senior citizens, timely resolution is particularly crucial.

Justice G. S. Sandhawalia, the Hon'ble Co-Chair, responded that while the Permanent Lok Adalat mechanism under the Act is intended to ensure resolution within the shortest possible period, delays often occur due to the lack of promptness on the part of authorities and public sector undertakings.

Justice P. S. Narasimha, the Hon'ble Chair, added that the key lies in developing a culture of expediency through consistent monitoring and institutionalization. His Lordship emphasized that NALSA has a vital role to play in this regard by creating platforms to share experiences across States and Districts, organizing such conferences regularly, and issuing Standard Operating Procedures and advisories from time to time — thereby strengthening the institutional culture of timely justice delivery.

5. **Member, Permanent Lok Adalat, Chandigarh**, emphasized the need for proper sensitization and orientation of newly appointed members. She stated that while advocates joining the Lok Adalats are generally familiar with legal procedures, members from social work or non-legal backgrounds often begin without any formal training or orientation, which affects their ability to function effectively. She stressed that

structured sensitization programmes are therefore essential. She further suggested that adopting an online case management system, similar to consumer forums, would make the process more accessible, particularly for social workers and other field-based professionals and allowing online filing of cases would help increase the number of matters brought before the Permanent Lok Adalats.

Justice P. S. Narasimha, the Hon'ble Chair, welcomed the suggestion, noting that a similar model already exists for mediation, where the Supreme Court has introduced an online, interactive training programme that can be accessed flexibly by participants. His Lordship suggested that NALSA could consider developing a platform for sensitization and capacity-building of stakeholders in the Permanent Lok Adalat system. His Lordship further suggested that there should be a dedicated space or forum where such ideas and feedback from stakeholders can be shared and acted upon.

6. **Chairman, Permanent Lok Adalat, Chandigarh**, suggested that the functioning of PLAs should follow a structured unit system similar to that of regular courts to ensure accountability and consistent productivity. He observed that in Chandigarh, PLAs are efficiently disposing of around 25 cases each through both amicable settlements and adjudication on merits. He further mentioned that as early as 2022, a proposal had been submitted to make PLA orders available online.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Anand Pathak, Judge, High Court of Madhya Pradesh and Chairman, High Court Legal Services Committee, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, responded that most of the issues raised during the discussion can indeed be addressed at the State level. Referring to the statutory framework, he noted that Section 29A of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, empowers each SLSA to frame regulations.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

In his concluding address, Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. S. Narasimha emphasized the need for sustained follow-up and institutional commitment to strengthen the functioning of PLAs. His Lordship urged that in States where Permanent Lok Adalats have not yet been established, proactive steps should be taken to engage with the Government and ensure their establishment at the earliest.

For States that already have PLAs in place, his Lordship underscored that the institutionalization of a continuous monitoring mechanism is essential. His Lordship stated that only through such systematic oversight can the functioning of PLAs be regularly assessed, their impact measured, and necessary improvements identified for the future.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIR

Justice G.S. Sandhawalia, the Hon'ble Co-Chair, stated that the discussion had clearly outlined the roadmap ahead, what remains now is to put all the four R's, viz. Reach, Regularity, Responsiveness & Results, in place to achieve the desired results. His Lordship urged particular attention from larger States such as Gujarat and West Bengal, noting that progress in these jurisdictions would make a significant impact on the overall national picture.

RECOMMENDATIONS/WAY FORWARD

The views shared and discussed during the Session led to the articulation of the following recommendations for improving access to legal aid across the country:

1. Institutional Strengthening and Expansion

- Establish at least one functional PLA in every district to ensure universal coverage.
- Ensure robust monitoring mechanisms, including monthly reporting of sittings, disposals, settlement rates, and pendency.
- Introduce digital filing, mobile applications, and online portals for case submission, tracking, and monitoring.

2. Appointments and Leadership

- Appoint Chairmen and Members based on commitment to social justice, responsiveness, and empathy, rather than as post-retirement engagements.
- Develop a framework for selection, orientation, and performance evaluation of PLA Chairmen and Members, allowing States to adapt to local realities.
- Encourage active members of the Bar to participate in PLA sittings periodically to foster professional engagement and community trust.

3. Training and Capacity Building

- Conduct regular mediation and conciliation training for PLA Members and officers of Public Utility Services.

- Organize sensitization programs for Chairmen and Members on the scope, jurisdiction, and limits of PLAs, including developments on statutory provisions.
- Promote knowledge-sharing and best practices between PLAs across States to enhance institutional learning and efficiency.

4. Public Awareness and Outreach

- Conduct large-scale awareness campaigns using media, social platforms, and community events to educate citizens about PLA functions, jurisdiction, and benefits.
- Engage Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) as ambassadors for PLA awareness, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- Display PLA information, including jurisdiction, contact details, and sitting schedules, in public offices, banks, insurance companies, and PSU offices.

5. Engagement with Public Utility Service Providers

- Organize regular meetings between PLAs, SLSAs, and PSU heads to encourage active participation and address concerns.
- Conduct joint workshops and capacity-building sessions for PSU officers and PLA Members to foster collaborative dispute resolution.
- Expand the scope of PLAs to include additional citizen-centric public utility services, such as Aadhaar enrolment, ration card issuance, pensions, municipal services, and education-related services.

6. Financial Efficiency and Resource Optimization

- Periodically evaluate the cost per case settled and identify best practices from high-performing States to optimize expenditure.
- Implement a “four R’s” performance framework – Reach, Regularity, Responsiveness, and Results – for evaluation of PLAs.

7. Transparency, Credibility, and Public Confidence

- Display annual sitting calendars at PLA premises and online to promote predictability and transparency.
- Establish feedback and grievance mechanisms to enable citizens to report issues and improve accountability.
- Promote regularity of sittings and timely disposal of cases to enhance credibility and public trust.

WORKING SESSION V
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND BUDGETARY ALLOCATION IN LEGAL
SERVICES INSTITUTIONS
9TH NOVEMBER, 2025, 11:30 AM TO 12:30 PM

Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India & Executive Chairman, NALSA

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva, Chief Justice, High Court of Madhya Pradesh

Co-Chair: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Arun Palli, Chief Justice, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh

Speaker 1: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ashutosh Kumar, Chief Justice, Gauhati High Court

Speaker 2: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra, Executive Chairperson, Punjab State Legal Services Authority

Moderator: Mr. Bharat Parashar, Member Secretary, NALSA & Ms. Aarti Singh, Addl. District Judge, Haryana/ OSD NALSA

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SURYA KANT
JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA & EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, NALSA

The session, chaired by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India, focused on the critical theme of ensuring effective financial management and optimal utilization of funds within Legal Services Institutions. The discussion emphasized compliance with statutory mandates, transparent utilization of grants, and innovative strategies for strengthening financial governance mechanisms under the Legal Services Authorities framework.

Justice Surya Kant highlighted three core areas of concern for deliberation-

- 1. Grants-in-Aid Assessment and Allocation** – Addressing inconsistencies between fund demands and utilization, the Chair emphasized that State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs) spend allocated funds within the intended heads under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- 2. Compliance with the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987:** Emphasis on the utilization of funds towards the envisaged goal under the provisions of the said act and maintenance of accounts.

3. Regulatory Adherence-Reinforcing adherence to the General Financial Rules (GFR) 2017 and the Delegation of Financial Power Rules, 2024, to promote efficiency and accountability. Ensuring that statutory funds are utilized strictly for purposes defined under the Act and as per NALSA's guidelines

The Hon'ble Chair drew attention to the NALSA Memorandum issued on 19 July 2025; a compilation of the instructions and the guidelines being issued by NALSA from time to time. It intended to reduce delays and clarify the decision-making powers of SLSAs and DLSAs. His Lordship urged all Executive Chairpersons to ensure thorough dissemination and understanding of these guidelines at all levels, emphasizing that they empower the authorities to act decisively without over-dependence on NALSA for minor approvals.

Justice Surya Kant elaborated on the bifurcation of funds, noting that 50% of the total budget is earmarked for Legal Aid and Advice, 25% for Awareness and Outreach, and 25% for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Mediation. However, by September 2025, only 16.93% of the Legal Aid and Advice budget had been utilized, while expenditure under Awareness and Outreach exceeded its allocation. His Lordship described this imbalance as a serious management concern, urging all authorities to introspect and prioritize spending on core legal aid functions.

He emphasized that effective financial planning must align with statutory obligations under the 1987 Act, ensuring every rupee serves the purpose of enhancing access to justice. His Lordship concluded that public funds are a public trust, and fiscal discipline is essential for sustaining confidence in the legal aid movement.

REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIR

1. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SANJEEV SACHDEVA, CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF MADHYA PRADESH

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva, Chief Justice of Madhya Pradesh High Court, began by observing that despite substantial annual allocations from NALSA, significant portions of funds remain unutilized year after year. For instance, in 2023–2024, out of ₹200 crore allocated, only about half was spent, with ₹148 crore carried forward to the next year. Similarly, in 2025–2026, though ₹200 crore was allocated and ₹114 crore released, a large unspent balance persisted.

Hon'ble Co-Chair noted that the practice of carrying forward unspent funds defeats the purpose of allocation. The emphasis, he said, should shift from preservation to utilization, urging SLSAs to proactively spend for beneficiary-oriented initiatives. He discouraged the practice of accumulating funds in fixed deposits, stressing that financial prudence must not be mistaken for inaction.

He suggested introducing quarterly financial planning with clear expenditure targets. He recommended that SLSAs plan to spend 40% of their allocations in the first quarter itself, ensuring a proactive start to the financial year. He also emphasized digital monitoring tools, proposing a real-time dashboard for fund utilization accessible to Executive Chairpersons and Member Secretaries, enabling daily oversight of expenditures at state, district, and taluka levels.

He further suggested that selection of Member Secretaries should be made with due consideration of administrative foresight and financial management skills. He also shared innovative outreach examples from various states, such as jail infrastructure improvements through collaborative funding and court visits for children, aimed at enhancing public engagement with the justice system.

In his concluding remarks he urged all stakeholders to pledge personal commitment toward ensuring optimal fund utilization, quoting Robert Frost's line: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep."

2. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ARUN PALLI, CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR AND LADAKH

Hon'ble Co-Chair Mr. Justice Arun Palli, Chief Justice, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh observed that financial management is crucial but not the sole determinant of institutional success. Effective planning, accountability, and clarity of purpose are equally vital to realizing the objectives of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and Article 39A of the Constitution.

He highlighted a recurring issue where certain SLSAs utilized NALSA's grant-in-aid for administrative expenses, contrary to Section 6(7) and 9(7) of the Act, which clearly demarcate administrative funds (from the State Treasury) and operational legal aid funds (from NALSA). His Lordship urged strict segregation of these streams to ensure compliance.

He noted that as of September 2025, ₹165.86 crore remained unspent for the financial year 2025–2026, underscoring the need for urgent fiscal efficiency. He elaborated on the transition to the Hybrid Treasury Single Account (HTSA) System, introduced through the Finance Ministry’s circular of May 2024.

Additionally, he pointed out the urgent need to enhance awareness of entitlements under Section 12 of the Act, especially for women, industrial workers, and marginalized communities. He linked low fund utilization with limited awareness, suggesting that improved outreach could naturally translate into higher effective expenditure.

Concluding his remarks, Hon’ble Chief Justice emphasized that clarity, transparency, and accountability in financial management must directly translate into tangible results for beneficiaries.

VIEW OF THE HON’BLE SPEAKERS

1. HON’BLE MR. JUSTICE ASHUTOSH KUMAR, CHIEF JUSTICE, GAUHATI HIGH COURT

Justice Ashutosh Kumar emphasized that public money is a public trust, and every rupee spent must be judiciously utilized for its intended purpose with complete transparency. He highlighted that the HTSA model has been introduced to ensure there is no parking of funds and that all financial transactions are visible to the treasury, promoting accountability and ease of operations. He cautioned that while funds must be utilized to avoid lapsing, financial governance requires judicious allocation and spending, not expenditure merely for the sake of utilization. With NALSA’s intervention, greater flexibility has been introduced in modifying fund allocation percentages as per emerging needs. Justice Ashutosh further stressed the importance of focusing on genuine legal aid purposes rather than excessive spending on outreach activities. He advised that the Patron-in-Chief and Executive Chairman of the Legal Services Authorities should engage actively with State Governments to ensure timely release and utilization of the State share of funds. He also underscored the need to enhance legal aid initiatives such as the establishment of legal aid clinics for tribal populations and innovative outreach programs like Virasat Parivar to expand access to justice. Additionally, he pointed out that beneficiaries under Section 12 must be correctly identified to prevent misuse of legal aid benefits, ensuring that assistance reaches only the intended categories. He concluded that judicious

utilization of funds would eliminate fund parking issues and facilitate smoother financial operations.

2. HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ASHWINI KUMAR MISHRA, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, PUNJAB STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Justice Ashwini Kumar Mishra, in his remarks, explained that there are three main sources of funds i.e., National Legal Aid Fund, state budget allocations, and cost fund each governed by separate management mechanisms. While National Legal Aid Fund is managed through the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), State funds are managed through the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS), where the funds remain with the State treasury. This, he noted, often results in delays and inefficiencies, as SLSAs and DLSAs do not directly receive these funds and are dependent on State treasuries for disbursement. He suggested developing an API-based integration between PFMS and IFMS to enable real-time visibility, monitoring, and better synchronization of fund utilization between the two systems. Justice Ashwini Kumar Mishra also proposed the creation of a real-time financial dashboard to track fund flow and utilization more effectively. He further recommended enhancing the financial sanction limits for Executive Chairmen and Member Secretaries to minimize administrative delays. Additionally, he highlighted the need for appointing financial experts at the district level to strengthen financial management and called for regular training programs for existing staff to build capacity in financial governance.

INTERACTIVE SESSION

During the interactive discussion, Member Secretaries and Para-Legal Volunteers shared practical challenges and experiences from across states. Participants from Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, and Uttarakhand highlighted improved public awareness of free legal aid services through camps, nukkad natak, and police station visits.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

In his closing remarks, Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant reiterated that financial management is not merely an administrative exercise but a moral responsibility. He urged all State Legal Services Authorities to widen the scope of legal aid and advice by identifying new beneficiary areas, organize workshops to explain and translate the 19 July 2025 Guidelines for field

officers, encourage proactive spending on core legal aid activities, avoiding fear-driven bureaucratic inertia.

His Lordship emphasized that unspent allocations weaken future funding prospects, as central authorities assess past utilization before granting new allocations. He called upon all Executive Chairpersons and Member Secretaries to adopt a fearless yet judicious approach to financial decision-making.

Justice Surya Kant concluded by stating that efficient financial management is the backbone of effective justice delivery, and that the ultimate measure of success lies not in the amount of money saved but, in the lives, transformed through its meaningful utilization.

VALEDICTORY FUNCTION

9th November, 2025

The **Valedictory Session** of the *National Conference on "Strengthening Legal Aid Delivery Mechanisms"* marked the conclusion of two days of intensive discussions and deliberations focused on strengthening the legal aid ecosystem in India.

The session was graced by the august presence of Hon'ble Mr. Justice B.R. Gavai, Chief Justice of India and Patron-in-Chief, NALSA; Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Chief Justice Designate of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA; Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Chairman, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee;

The Valedictory Session was attended by Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India, Learned Attorney General for India, Learned Additional Solicitor General, Chief Justices of Various High Courts and Executive Chairpersons of State Legal Services Authorities, Senior Judges of various High Courts, Member Secretaries of SLSAs, Secretaries of High Court Legal Services Committees, Permanent Lok Adalat Members, Panel Lawyers, Legal Aid Defense Counsels, Paralegal Volunteers, and other distinguished participants from across the country.

ADDRESS

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE VIKRAM NATH
JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA & CHAIRMAN, SUPREME COURT
LEGAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Valedictory Session commenced with the address of Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, who reflected upon the constitutional vision underlying the legal aid movement. It was observed that *Legal Services Day* is not merely a commemoration of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, but a reaffirmation of the promise contained in Article 39A, to ensure equal access to justice for all.

True progress, it was emphasized, lies in bringing justice closer to those most deprived of it. Drawing attention to the condition of undertrial prisoners, legal aid was described as an act of restoration, reaffirming the significance of the Legal Aid Defense Counsel (LADC) System in ensuring structured, accountable, and fair representation.

The selfless efforts of Panel Lawyers and Paralegal Volunteers were lauded as embodying the spirit of the constitutional promise. Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, it was reminded that a true lawyer places truth and service before self.

It was further highlighted that access to justice is not uniform but must be empathetic and inclusive, shaped by social and economic realities. Concluding with the words of T.S. Eliot, the speaker urged that “to make an end is to make a beginning,” calling upon all stakeholders to renew their collective resolve to strengthen the legal aid movement.

ADDRESS

HON’BLE MR. JUSTICE SURYA KANT JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA & EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, NALSA

Hon’ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, in his address, commended the meaningful deliberations that marked the two-day conference. It was observed that the discussions reflected both the depth of experience and the breadth of commitment of all stakeholders dedicated to ensuring equitable access to justice.

The evolving role of NALSA and the State Legal Services Authorities was highlighted, noting their transformation from statutory institutions into symbols of constitutional empathy. Legal aid, it was emphasized, must be accessible, efficient, and compassionate, with a focus not only on expanding reach but also on deepening impact.

The key sessions of the conference, including those on institutional defense for inclusive justice systems, the role of panel lawyers, empowerment of paralegal volunteers, strengthening of permanent Lok Adalats, and fiscal management, were discussed as integral to building a holistic and responsive legal aid framework.

Concluding on a note of optimism, faith was reaffirmed in NALSA’s leadership and institutional continuity, with confidence that the legal services movement will continue to advance with renewed imagination, compassion, and commitment.

LAUNCH OF NATIONAL LEGAL AID DEFENSE COUNSEL SYSTEM (LADCS) DASHBOARD

Following the addresses, Hon’ble the Chief Justice of India, Mr. Justice B.R. Gavai, launched the National Legal Aid Defense Counsel (LADC) Dashboard,

in the presence of Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath.

This Dashboard marks a major step towards digitization and transparency in legal aid administration. It aids in the transition from manual reporting to an integrated digital platform, reducing duplication, minimizing delays, and ensuring accuracy.

By providing real-time data and performance insights of the case work, it enables continuous monitoring of case work undertaken by Legal Aid Defense Counsel in 703 districts, the Dashboard will help in data driven policy decision/future action across the country.

PRESENTATION OF MEMENTOES

Mementoes were presented to all the dignitaries on the dais in appreciation of their invaluable contributions to the cause of justice and for their continued guidance in strengthening legal aid delivery mechanisms across the country.

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE BHUSHAN RAMKRISHNA GAVAI CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA & PATRON-IN-CHIEF, NALSA

Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India, Mr. Justice B.R. Gavai, in his valedictory address, reflected on the journey of India's legal aid movement, from its modest beginnings to becoming a vast institutional network ensuring access to justice for the marginalized.

It was emphasized that progress must be measured by the impact on people's lives, not by intentions alone. A culture of reflection and review was called for, with Legal Services Authorities encouraged to collaborate with academic and research institutions to conduct periodic social audits of schemes and interventions to assess real-world outcomes.

The creation of an Advisory Committee at NALSA and SLISA levels was proposed, comprising current and incoming Executive Chairpersons to ensure long-term institutional planning and continuity of vision.

Emphasis was placed on the principle that legal aid is not charity but a moral duty, and that officers and volunteers must act with compassion, empathy, and administrative imagination. The need for timely remuneration, continuous capacity building, and psychological support for paralegal

volunteers and legal aid defense counsels, who form the backbone of the system, was also underlined.

The address concluded by reaffirming that the Legal Aid Movement stands as one of the finest expressions of the Constitution, a bridge between the law's ideals and the lived realities of the people.

VOTE OF THANKS
SHRI BHARAT PARASHAR
MEMBER SECRETARY, NALSA

The Member Secretary, National Legal Services Authority, delivered the vote of thanks, extending heartfelt gratitude to the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath, and all participating dignitaries for their guidance and presence.

Appreciation was extended to the Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, the Attorney General and Solicitor Generals of India, the State Legal Services Authorities, Panel Lawyers, Legal Aid Defense Counsels, and Paralegal Volunteers for their steadfast commitment to the cause of justice.

Acknowledgement was made of the cooperation extended by the Department of Justice, Delhi Police, Prasar Bharati, and the Supreme Court Administration, as well as the tireless efforts of the NALSA Organising Committee, officers, staff, and volunteers, whose dedication ensured the success of the Conference.

The session also featured the e-launch of the Community Mediation Programme, the National Photography and Art Showcase, and the screening of a documentary on NALSA's achievements, each portraying resilience, hope, and empowerment.

Concluding the proceedings, it was remarked that the Valedictory did not mark an end but reaffirmed a shared journey, to make legal aid not merely a service but a movement of empathy, empowerment, and equality, ensuring that the light of justice reaches every life it is meant to touch.
