



Third National Lok Adalat

For Prelims: [National Legal Services Authority \(NALSA\)](#), [National Lok Adalat](#), [Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987](#), [Gandhian Principles](#), [Alternative Dispute Resolution \(ADR\)](#), [Quasi-Judicial Bodies](#), [Permanent Lok Adalats](#)

For Mains: Functions of Lok Adalat as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) system and associated challenges.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

In the near past, the [National Legal Services Authority \(NALSA\)](#) organised the 3rd [National Lok Adalat](#) of the year 2024 in the Taluks, Districts and High Courts of **27 States/UTs**.

- It was organised under the stewardship of **Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Judge of the Supreme Court** of India and Executive Chairman, NALSA.

What are the Key Highlights of the 3rd National Lok Adalat 2024?

- **Number of Cases Settled:** Over **1.14 crore cases** were resolved during the 3rd National Lok Adalat 2024. It is a big step towards **reducing** the burgeoning **pendency in courts**.
- **Breakdown of the Settled Cases:** Of the **1,14,56,529 cases** settled in the Lok Adalat, 94,60,864 were [pre-litigation cases](#) and 19,95,665 were cases **pending** in various courts.
- **Types of Cases Settled:** The cases include **criminal compoundable offences**, traffic challans, revenue cases, bank recovery cases, motor accident claims, cheque dishonour cases, labour disputes, **matrimonial disputes (excluding divorce cases)**, land acquisition cases, intellectual property rights, and other civil cases.
- **Financial Value of Settlement:** The approximate value of the total settlement amount in these cases was Rs 8,482.08 crore.
- **Positive Public Response:** The event saw **overwhelming participation**, reflecting strong public trust in Lok Adalats. It aligns with the objectives set out in the [Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987](#), and the **National Legal Services Authority (Lok Adalats) Regulations, 2009**.

What is Lok Adalat?

- **About:** Lok Adalat, or People's Court, is a forum designed for settling disputes either **pending in court or at the pre-litigation stage** through **compromise or amicable settlement**.
 - The Supreme Court emphasises that Lok Adalat is an **ancient Indian system** of adjudication that still holds relevance today, rooted in [Gandhian principles](#).
 - It forms a part of the [Alternative Dispute Resolution \(ADR\)](#) system, which seeks to relieve the burdened Indian courts.
- **Objective:** Its purpose is to provide **quick, inexpensive justice** without the lengthy and expensive procedures common in regular courts.

- In Lok Adalat, there are **no victors or losers**, making it a **harmonious approach** to dispute resolution.
- **Historical Development:** The first Lok Adalat camp in independent India was held in **Gujarat in 1982**, where its success in settling disputes led to its spread nationwide.
- **Legal Framework:** Initially functioning as a **voluntary institution** without legal authority, the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** provided **statutory status** to Lok Adalats.
 - This Act gave the institution the authority to pass awards with the same effect as a **court decree**.
- **Organising Agencies:** Lok Adalats can be organised by **NALSA, State Legal Services Authority, District Legal Services Authority, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee, High Court Legal Services Committee, or Taluk Legal Services Committee** at intervals and places they deem necessary.
- **Composition:** A Lok Adalat typically includes a **judicial officer (chairman)**, a **lawyer**, and a **social worker**.
- **Jurisdiction:**
 - Lok Adalat has jurisdiction over disputes including **pending court cases** and **pre-litigation matters** that fall under the jurisdiction of courts.
 - It deals with various cases such as **matrimonial disputes, compoundable criminal offences, labour disputes, bank recovery, housing, and consumer grievances**.
 - Lok Adalat does **not** have **jurisdiction over non-compoundable offences**, such as serious criminal cases, as these cannot be settled through compromise.
- **Referral of Cases to Lok Adalat:** Cases can be referred to Lok Adalat if
 - the parties thereof agree to **settle the dispute in the Lok Adalat**.
 - **one** of the **parties** thereof makes an **application** to the court **referring** the case to the **Lok Adalat**.
 - the **court is satisfied** that the matter is an **appropriate** one to take cognizance of by the Lok Adalat.
 - **Pre-Litigation Referral:** Pre-litigation disputes can be referred upon receiving an application from any of the parties involved, ensuring that disputes are addressed before they reach the court system.
- **Powers:** The Lok Adalat shall have the **same powers** as are vested in a **Civil Court** under the **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908** while trying a suit in respect of the following matters.
 - The **summoning** and enforcing the attendance of any witness.
 - The discovery and **production of any document**.
 - Receiving evidence on affidavits.
 - Requisitioning **public records** or documents from courts or offices.
- **Proceedings of Lok Adalat:**
 - **Self-Determined Procedure:** Lok Adalat can specify its **own procedures** for settling disputes, making the process **flexible and informal** compared to formal courts.
 - **Judicial Proceedings:** All Lok Adalat proceedings are deemed **judicial proceedings** under the [Indian Penal Code, 1860 \(Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, 2023\)](#) and have the status of a **Civil Court** under the [Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 \(Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023\)](#).
- **Binding Nature of Awards:**
 - **Decree of Civil Court:** Awards made by Lok Adalat have the status of a decree of a civil court and are **final and binding** on the parties.
 - **Non-Appealable:** Awards **cannot be appealed** in any court, ensuring the **quick resolution** of disputes without the delays caused by lengthy appeals.



What are the Benefits of Lok Adalat?

- **No Court Fees:** Lok Adalat does **not charge court fees**, and any fees paid are refunded if the dispute is settled in Lok Adalat.
- **Procedural Flexibility:** The procedures are **simple** and not bound by technical rules of evidence or civil procedure, allowing for a **speedy trial** of disputes.
- **Direct Interaction:** The parties to the dispute can **directly interact with the judge** through their counsel which is not possible in regular courts of law.
- **Final and Binding Awards:** The award by the Lok Adalat is binding on the parties and it has the status of a decree of a civil court and it is **non-appealable**, which does not cause the delay in the settlement of disputes finally.
- **Less Time-Consuming:** Lok Adalat provides **quicker resolutions**, avoiding the long delays of formal court proceedings.
- **Harmonious Judgement:** Lok Adalat fosters a spirit of cooperation where neither party feels like they have lost, and the relationship between disputing parties is often restored.

What are the challenges in Functioning Lok Adalat?

- **Voluntary Nature of Participation:** While Lok Adalats aim for amicable dispute resolution, both parties **must voluntarily agree** to participate. If either party is unwilling, the case cannot proceed.
- **Judicial Caution on Speedy Proceedings:** The higher judiciary has emphasised that the speed in Lok Adalat proceedings should **not compromise the rights of any party** and fair representation.
- **Limited Scope:** Lok Adalats' authority is **restricted to civil and compoundable criminal cases**, limiting their ability to address a broader range of legal issues.
- **Absence of Appeal:** Once a case is resolved in a Lok Adalat, the decision is final with no provision

for appeal. It may deter litigants from opting for this route, **especially if they feel dissatisfied with the outcome.**

- **Reluctance of Parties:** People, at times, insist on sticking to the **formal court procedures**, fearing that an out-of-court settlement may not serve their interests fully.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening the Core Principles of ADR:** Lok Adalats must reaffirm their role as **conciliation and settlement platforms** rather than evolving into [quasi-judicial bodies](#).
 - To ensure this, proper training of judges and personnel is essential so that they prioritise **amicable dispute resolution** over formal adjudication.
- **Access for Vulnerable Sections:** A **proactive outreach strategy** can involve Legal Services Authorities visiting rural and remote areas to conduct **pre-litigation consultations** and guide citizens on how Lok Adalats can help resolve their disputes.
- **Addressing Concerns About Speed vs. Fairness:** Lok Adalats could adopt a **tiered system** where disputes requiring in-depth hearings are allocated more time to prevent the risk of hurried decisions that may lead to an unjust outcome.
- **Expanding Jurisdiction of Permanent Lok Adalats:** The jurisdiction of Permanent Lok Adalats (currently restricted to **public utility services**) can be expanded to cover more categories of cases, such as **small civil disputes, consumer issues**, and **family matters**. This would help in reducing court backlogs and improving access to justice.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the role of Lok Adalats as an Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. With reference to National Legal Services Authority, consider the following statements: (2013)

1. Its objective is to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society on the basis of equal opportunity.
2. It issues guidelines for the State Legal Services Authorities to implement the legal programmes and schemes throughout the country.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (c)

Q. With reference to Lok Adalats, which of the following statements is correct? (2010)

- (a) Lok Adalats have the jurisdiction to settle the matters at pre-litigative stage and not those matters pending before any court
- (b) Lok Adalats can deal with matters which are civil and not criminal in nature

(c) Every Lok Adalat consists of either serving or retired judicial officers only and not any other person

(d) None of the statements given above is correct

Ans: (d)

Q. With reference to Lok Adalats, consider the following statements: (2009)

1. An award made by a Lok Adalat is deemed to be a decree of a civil court and no appeal lies against thereto before any court.

2. Matrimonial/Family disputes are not covered under Lok Adalat.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (a)

Mains

What are the major changes brought in the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 through the recent Ordinance promulgated by the President? How far will it improve India's dispute resolution mechanism? Discuss **(2015)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/third-national-lok-adalat>

