9 November – National Legal Services Day observed across the country

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News

9 November, the day the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 came into force, is observed every year as National Legal Services Day. On 9 November 2026 the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the State, District and Taluk Legal Services Authorities held legal-aid awareness programmes across the country. The Act was passed in 1987 but came into force only on 9 November 1995. It aims to give free and competent legal services to weaker sections – women, children, SC/ST members, persons in custody, low-income people and others – and to settle disputes amicably through Lok Adalats. The Chief Justice of India is NALSA's Patron-in-Chief; the present CJI is Surya Kant. Article 39A of the Constitution directs the State to promote justice on the basis of equal opportunity and provide free legal aid.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Act	Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987
In force	9 Nov 1995 → National Legal Services Day
Constitution	Art 39A (42nd Amendment, 1976) – free legal aid
NALSA	Patron-in-Chief: CJI; Executive Chairman: senior-most SC judge after CJI

Point	Details
NALSA office	Jaisalmer House, New Delhi
State level	Patron-in-Chief: Chief Justice of the High Court
District level	Chairman: District Judge
Lok Adalat award	Sec 21 – deemed civil-court decree; no appeal
Permanent Lok Adalat	Sec 22B (2002 amendment) – public utility services

Background

- History: in the 1970s, committees headed by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer and Justice P.N. Bhagwati recommended free legal aid. The 42nd Amendment (1976) added Article 39A as a Directive Principle. In 1980 the Committee for Implementing Legal Aid Schemes (CILAS) was set up under Justice Bhagwati. The Act was passed in 1987 and, after a 1994 amendment, came into force on 9 November 1995.
- Case law: in M.H. Hoskot v. State of Maharashtra (1978) the Supreme Court held free legal aid for an appeal to be part of Article 21. In Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979), on undertrials jailed for years without trial, it declared speedy trial and free legal aid to be fundamental rights under Article 21.
- Structure: a three-tier set-up – NALSA nationally (Sec 3), the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (Sec 3A), SLSAs in States (Sec 6), DLSAs in districts (Sec 9) and Taluk Legal Services Committees. Section 12 lists those entitled to free legal services.
- Lok Adalats: the first Lok Adalat camp was held in Gujarat in 1982. No court fee is charged, and fees already paid are refunded. Under Section 21 the award is deemed a civil-court decree, final and not appealable in any court. The 2002 amendment (Chapter VI-A) created Permanent Lok Adalats for disputes over public utility services – transport, postal, telephone, power, water, hospitals and the like – which can be approached even before a case is filed.

Tamil Nadu link: the Tamil Nadu State Legal Services Authority (TNSLSA) functions from the Madras High Court campus; the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court is its Patron-in-Chief, and a High Court judge nominated by the Governor in consultation with the Chief Justice is Executive Chairman. Every district has a DLSA headed by the District Judge. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, a champion of legal aid and Lok Adalats, was also a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly (1952).

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Act: Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987; In force: 9 Nov 1995 → National Legal Services Day; Constitution: Art 39A (42nd Amendment, 1976) – free legal aid; NALSA: Patron-in-Chief: CJI; Executive Chairman: senior-most SC judge after CJI.

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Practice questions (with answers)

1. Under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, who is the Patron-in-Chief of the Tamil Nadu State Legal Services Authority?

A) Governor of Tamil Nadu

B) Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

C) Chief Justice, Madras HC

D) Advocate General of TN

Answer: C – Explanation: The Chief Justice of the Madras High Court (Section 6). Nationally, the CJI is NALSA's Patron-in-Chief.

2. Which statement about an award passed by a Lok Adalat is correct?

A) Appeal to High Court

B) Final; no appeal lies

C) Appeal to District Court

D) Needs SC approval

Answer: B – Explanation: Section 21 – it is deemed a civil-court decree, binding on all parties, and no appeal lies to any court.

3. Which 1979 case declared speedy trial and free legal aid for undertrials to be rights under Article 21?

A) Kesavananda Bharati

B) Maneka Gandhi

C) Minerva Mills

D) Hussainara Khatoon

Answer: D – Explanation: Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979) – a PIL on undertrials held for years in Bihar jails.

4. In which year did the Legal Services Authorities Act, passed in 1987, come into force?

A) 1987

B) 1976

C) 1995

D) 2002

Answer: C – Explanation: 9 November 1995 – hence Legal Services Day on 9 Nov. 1976 – Article 39A added; 2002 – Permanent Lok Adalat amendment.

5. Permanent Lok Adalats, created by the 2002 amendment, settle disputes relating to what?

A) Public utility services

B) Serious criminal cases

C) Election disputes

D) Constitutional interpretation

Answer: A – Explanation: Public utility services – transport, postal, telephone, power, water, hospitals, etc. (Chapter VI-A, Section 22B).

Sources: NALSA; India Code – Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987; LiveLaw, 3 Nov 2026. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.