



Non-functioning of Permanent Lok Adalats in Rajasthan

Why in News?

The Rajasthan government's delay in extending the tenure of presiding officers and members has led to the **suspension of [Permanent Lok Adalats \(PLAs\)](#) functioning in 16 districts** of the state, delaying the resolution of thousands of pending cases.

- The **State Legal Services Authority** clarified on 3rd May 2025 that members whose tenure ended cannot participate in [dispute resolution](#).

Note: In Jodhpur alone, over **972 cases are pending**, while the Rajasthan High Court estimated the total backlog across districts may exceed 10,000 cases.

Key Points

Judicial Response

- **Rajasthan High Court** took [suo motu cognisance](#) and expressed concern over the serious implications for access to justice and the **right to a fair trial (Article 21)**.
- A Division Bench of HC cited the [Supreme Court](#)'s ruling in **Brij Mohan Lal vs. Union of India (2012)**, which permits [judicial review](#) of policy decisions if found arbitrary or mala fide.
- A Senior Advocate has been appointed by the HC as [amicus curiae](#) to assist in the case proceedings.
 - An amicus curiae (literally, "**friend of the court**") is someone who is **not a party to a case** and may or may not have been solicited by a party and who assists a court by **offering information, expertise, and bearing on issues of the case**.

Permanent Lok Adalats (PLAs)

- **About:**
 - PLA operates under **Section 22-B of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**.
 - It is a **statutory body** created to **ensure pre-litigation conciliation and settlement**, especially in matters involving Public Utility Services.
 - PLAs provide a **mandatory pre-litigation platform** for parties to attempt conciliation.
 - However, **Lok Adalats has jurisdiction over both** the pending and pre-litigation matters.
 - PLAs cannot adjudicate cases involving criminal offences.
- **Composition:**
 - Each Permanent Lok Adalat consists of:
 - One Chairman (typically a retired judicial officer), and
 - Two other members with experience in public service or law.
- **Binding Nature:**
 - The award passed by a Permanent Lok Adalat is **final and binding on all parties**.

- If the parties fail to reach a mutual settlement, **the PLA has the authority to decide the case on merits.**
- No appeal lies against the decision, ensuring quick and conclusive resolution.

Implications of Non-functioning of PLAs

- **Access to Justice:** Lok Adalats are an important mechanism for affordable and speedy justice, especially for vulnerable sections.
- **Case Backlog:** The halt threatens to exacerbate the existing judicial backlog, delaying dispute resolution further.
- **Disruption of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Framework:** The interruption weakens the alternative dispute resolution ecosystem, pushing more cases back to regular courts.
- **Litigant Uncertainty:** Pending judgments resulting from the expired tenures of officials leave litigants facing **prolonged uncertainty**, eroding trust in the legal system.

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.
 - SC 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 **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.
- **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.