

Brother and Sister Judges, Shri R.S. Gujral, Secretary, Department of Expenditure, Shri Ravindra Maithani, Secretary General, Supreme Court, Mrs. Asha Menon, Member Secretary, NALSA, Members of Bar, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this National Lok Adalat Meet organized by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) which was established with the objective of ensuring amicable justice in a speedy manner.

Equal and fair justice is the distinguishing attribute of any civilized society. It is for this reason that our Constitution casts a primary duty on the State to ensure equal justice for all by regulating the relations of citizens with one another, by checking turmoil and dominance of one class of people over others and by maintaining all those rights which are elementary to the existence and development of common man, through establishing the effective administration of justice. The Lok Adalat system provides an approachable forum to the poor, weaker and ignorant people who are often intimidated and confused by the greasy substantive and procedural laws. It is a voluntary mechanism and a major tool of legal aid programme

which is mainly concerned with providing a quick, easy, non-technical and disputant friendly forum to the people.

It is the first time since the inception of NALSA that such National Lok Adalat is endeavored to be organized. As the title itself suggests the significance of this National Lok Adalat is that it will be held across the country on the same day in the Supreme Court, the High Courts, District Courts and the Taluk level Courts thereby aiming to reduce the pendency of cases in courts while, at the same time, sensitizing the public about prevalent of efficacious alternative dispute resolution method of lok adalat.

Approximately, 39 lakhs cases are being proposed to be taken up in this National Lok Adalat comprising of large number of criminal compoundable cases, cheque bounce and Bank recovery cases, civil suits, motor accident claims, service matters, family matters and challan cases. Highest number of cases are listed for settlement in State of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra viz. 7,97,484 and 5,66,102 respectively whereas in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal around 4,00,000 and above cases are referred to lok adalats in each

State. In Delhi 3,00,000 cases have been referred for lok adalat out of which 2,73,000 are challan cases alone, which can easily be settled by lok adalat. As far as the Supreme Court is concerned, 105 matters are referred for disposal through the mechanism of lok adalat. Besides, it is also expected that along with the lok adalat, through the special sitting of magistrates and judges, a good number of infructuous cases are also expected to be taken up and disposed of today. Therefore, in all probabilities it is expected that a few lakh cases will be disposed of out of identified and referred matters to the National Lok Adalat.

Certainly, with the passage of time lok adalats have gained faith of the people by settling the disputes both effectively and amicably. However, for sustaining the faith in the system, it is obligatory for every presiding member of the lok adalat to make sincere efforts in bringing about a conciliated settlement in every case put before it without causing any kind of coercion, threat, undue influence, allurements or misrepresentation either directly or indirectly. My beloved presiding members of lok adalat, although you are guided by no tangible law while conducting the proceedings except the lok adalats regulations,

you shall be guided by principles of natural justice, equity, fairplay, objectivity, giving consideration to, among other things, the rights and obligations of the parties, custom and usages and the circumstances surrounding the dispute.

On this occasion, I also wish to emphasize that the members of the lok adalats must take the requisite steps to see that the parties are not intimidated or misled by the accompanying people to affix their signatures in the compromise deed. Since the award made by a lok adalat shall be final and binding on all the parties to the dispute and there lies no appeal to any court against the award, the presiding members owe an implied obligation to ensure that the parties fully understand the terms of settlement. It is equally vital that the members of the lok adalat should affix their signatures only in the settlement reached before them and should avoid affixing signatures to the settlement reached by the parties outside the lok adalat with the assistance of some third parties, to ensure that the lok adalats are not used by unscrupulous parties to commit fraud, forgery etc. Although, increased rate of disposal through lok adalat is significant, at the same time justice should not only be done but also seem to be done. The legal

service authorities must diligently follow these regulations numerated in the National Legal Services Authority (Lok Adalats) Regulations, 2009 while conducting Lok Adalats.

I am very glad that the technological advancement has permitted us to view and monitor the organizing of lok adalats all over the country through video conferencing and web casting facilitated by the e-committee of the Supreme Court of India and the National Informatics Centre, Govt. of India. I hope as envisaged in near future that all District and Taluk Court are computerized and interconnected for effective administration.

I strongly believe that alternative dispute resolution allows the poor and the marginalized to have access to justice without traversing long distances and bearing exorbitant litigation cost. Institutions like Lok Adalats must be nurtured for resolving disputes in an amicable, cooperative and non-adversarial manner, which will have a significant impact on the working of judicial system in the country. Observing, the increase in the number of cases being filed every year I feel that on account of success of this lok adalat this can also be organized as an yearly event untill such percentage of pendency of cases are

brought down. I am confident that the parties themselves will also be more inclined to settle the disputes through lok adalats as the law precribes for refund of court fee if the case is settled by lok adalats.

I convey my warmest wishes to the NALSA for successful organization of National Lok Adalat.

Thank You.

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