



Legal Aid and Empowerment initiatives launched

Ravi Shankar Prasad calls for Expediting Judicial Reforms

Posted On: 20 APR 2017 5:07PM by PIB Delhi

Minister of Law & Justice and Electronics & IT, Sh. Ravi Shankar Prasad today appealed to all those involved in the delivery of justice to join hands in improving the system to ensure that assistance is available to every citizen irrespective of his socio-economic position. He said this after the launch of three key legal aid and empowerment initiatives of the Department of Justice - including '*Pro bono* legal services', 'Tele law service' and '*Nyaya Mitra* scheme'. The Minister also mentioned that the country's legal system would be digitally transformed, as digital inclusion holds the key to the country's march towards Digital India.

The Minister emphasized the need for increased opportunities of legal aid and awareness for people, especially the marginalised sections of the society. He said that the three initiatives launched today were aimed at fulfilling the department's core mandate of enhancing '*access to justice*' for the poor and vulnerable communities, including making accessible quality and effective legal aid for them. He acknowledged and appreciated the initiatives undertaken, over the last two decades, to safeguard and deliver this right to citizens, first, by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and subsequently by the Department of Justice - both of whom have the shared mandate of delivering adequate and efficient legal aid to the marginalised and vulnerable sections. The Minister also underscored that the initiatives launched by the department here are to supplement the efforts of NALSA and not to overlap the activities undertaken by the legal services authorities.

Pro bono legal Services

The '***Pro bono* legal services**' initiative is a web based platform, through which interested lawyers can register themselves to volunteer pro bono services for the underprivileged litigants, who are unable to afford it. The Department of Justice has launched the online application for this initiative on its website doj.gov.in. Through this online portal, litigants from marginalised communities (including members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, women, children, senior citizens, persons with low income and persons with disabilities) can also apply for legal aid and advice from the pro bono lawyers.

The Minister described this effort as an 'earnest step' towards fulfilling the mandate of quality legal aid for all. He noted that many from the legal fraternity were already volunteering legal support for the underprivileged clients, in an individual capacity. However, he stressed that the time has come to promote the concept of pro bono legal aid in an institutionalized manner and ensure that those who volunteer their valuable time and service towards this public service are duly recognized.

The Minister called upon all lawyers from across the country to wholeheartedly support this initiative and help in fulfilling the constitutional mandate of legal aid for all.

Tele Law: Mainstreaming Legal Aid through Common Service Centre

Through the second initiative, launched by the Minister, the Department of Justice and NALSA are partnering with CSC- E-Governance Service Limited for mainstreaming legal aid to the marginalized communities through the Common Service Centers (CSCs). This initiative, called '***Tele Law***', is aimed at facilitating delivery of legal advice through an expert panel of lawyers - stationed at the State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA). The project would connect lawyers with clients through video conferencing facilities at CSCs, operated by para legal volunteers. For this purpose, this initiative would also play a pivotal role in empowering 1000 women para legal volunteers.

The Minister said that using CSCs for mainstreaming legal aid services for the marginalized at the panchayat levels would ensure that legal aid reaches populations which remained untouched due to geographical challenges and/or lack of infrastructure. He also described the use of CSCs as change agents, enablers of community participation and capacity building in rural settings as commendable.

The project would be launched across 1800 panchayats in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, North Eastern States and Jammu & Kashmir.

District Facilitation Centre to reduce pendency: Engagement of Nyaya Mitra

The Minister also discussed the issue of heavy pendency of cases in courts across the country. He noted that at present, more than 2.4 crore cases are pending in the district and lower judiciary, of which nearly 10% are more than 10 years old. He called for collective action and efforts in remedying this situation. In this context, the Minister also inaugurated the ***Nyaya Mitra*** scheme, which is aimed at reducing pendency of cases across selected districts, with special focus on those pending for more than 10 years.

Functionalized through a retired judicial or executive officer (with legal experience) designated as the 'Nyaya Mitra', the project would be operated out of District Facilitation Centres, housed in CSCs. Nyaya Mitra's responsibilities would include among others assistance to litigants who are suffering due to delay in investigations or trial, by actively identifying such cases through the National Judicial Data Grid, providing legal advice and connecting litigants to DLSA, CSC Tele Law, other government agencies and civil society organisations. He/she shall also refer the marginalized applicants to Lok Adalats for dispute resolution and render assistance towards prison reforms within the district, in coordination with the district judiciary and other stakeholders.

This initiative would be launched in 227 districts including 27 districts from North East and Jammu & Kashmir and 200 districts from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, Gujarat, West Bengal etc. and would be operated out of CSCs.

The Minister stated that the department was committed to fulfilling its mandate of securing access to justice through these initiatives and called for support and action for all stakeholders in making them a success.

NNK/MD

(Release ID: 1488303) Visitor Counter : 281

