

**South Zone-II Regional Conference on “Advancing Rule of Law through
Technology: Challenges & Opportunities”
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Programme Report

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The National Judicial Academy in collaboration with the High Court for the State of Telangana and the Telangana State Judicial Academy organized the South Zone-II Regional Conference at **Hyderabad on 14th & 15th March, 2026**. Judges from High Courts of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Madras, Karnataka and Telangana participated in the conference. The conference aimed to provide a forum for exchange of knowledge, experiences and dissemination of best practices among participant justices and judicial officers under the respective High Court's jurisdiction. The conference was designed to promote a dialogue between participant judges amongst judicial hierarchies on diverse themes centred around advancing the rule of law with the aid of technology. The conference intended to focus on contemporary technological advancements including artificial intelligence as well as on bridging the digital divide to enhance access to justice. The conference also explored the effective use of Technology in ADR, and Cybercrimes and Digital Forensics.

The conference commenced with the inaugural session. The welcome address was delivered by the Hon'ble Chief Justice, Telangana High Court followed by the introductory address by the Director, National Judicial Academy and the purpose and objective of the Regional Conference were explained. The keynote address and special address was delivered by the Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court and the vote of thanks was delivered by the Judge in charge of the Telangana Judicial Academy.

In inaugural session it was observed that judiciary has adopted technology to enhance access to justice and transparency in the functioning of courts. The responsible use of emerging technology was emphasised and the growing role of technology in dispute resolution was highlighted. The use of technology in research and translation of judgments in Indian languages was discussed. The use of AI in the judicial process was explained and the issues related to identification of patterns and algorithmic biases were highlighted. It was emphasised that AI is not a substitute of judicial reasoning and it is a tool which should be used intelligently. It was opined that there should be awareness of limitations of AI and its use in the context of courts and ethical use of AI was emphasised. It was observed that the function of the courts has become more visible and transparent because of live streaming.

Session 1: Bridging the Digital Divide: Role of e-Services

The session was commenced by highlighting the digital divide and the meaning of digital divide was explained. It was stated that the digital divide signifies the gap between individuals and communities that have access to digital technology and those that do not have such access. The causes of digital divide were explained including geographical causes, economic status and the level of digital skill and education. It was emphasized that the digital divide represents unequal access to technology as well as the knowledge and skills required to use it effectively.

The actual position of India in terms of digital divide was discussed and data from ICRIER, State of India's Digital Economy Report 2025, IAMA & Kantar, Internet in India Report (2024) and National Sample Survey (NSS) were shared. It was stated that India ranked 28 in user level digital adoption indicating uneven access and usage and about 41% of the population in India (around 630 million people) remain non-active internet users, with nearly 51% of them living in rural areas. It was further added that while over 80% of the population is traditionally literate, only 38% of Indian households are digitally literate. The digital connectivity gaps in rural India was focused upon and it was stated that despite the rapid growth of mobile users in

India, connectivity remains uneven across rural regions. The total number of mobile users in India may have reached 116.3 crore, yet out of the 5.97 lakh villages in the country, more than 25,000 villages still lack mobile or internet connectivity.

The issue regarding the impact of digital revolution on access to justice was discussed and it was stated that for people centered justice AI powered chatbots, automated case management, and multilingual platforms and provides timely, personalized legal help reducing dependency on lawyers. The reformation of formal and informal channels was emphasized and it was observed that technology facilitates online dispute resolution, virtual courts, and grievance bots that democratize access across formal courts and community justice systems thereby standardizing the procedure. It was opined that for human rights based and holistic approach AI enhances fairness, transparency and accessibility while requiring state regulation to protect vulnerable groups and ensure due process. The issue of decentralized justice was discussed and it was stated that by enabling asynchronous hearings and e-filing, decentralized justice removes geographic and physical constraints, improving court participation and speeding trial processing.

The discussion then focused on e-services and it was stated that digital courts eliminates territorial barriers and build channels to justice and in order to reform the informal system of justice there is need to move beyond the formal system. The importance of equity, gender sensitivity and access for vulnerable groups was highlighted and adequate innovations in e-filing, e-payment channels and e-records were suggested. The use of technology in equal workload distribution including trials transcending territorial jurisdiction was explained and integrating video conferencing as an essential tool for trials was emphasized. The 3 concepts for digital transformation of Indian judicial system i.e. justice as an idea of emancipation, certainty and less human intervention and prudent use of human resources were explained.

The discussion then focused on enhancing decentralization within the system and it was stated that the decentralized systems have no core authority to dictate the truth to other participants in the network and every participant in the network can access the history of transactions or confirm new transactions. Then various phases of the e-courts project were explained and it was stated that the first phase during 2011-2015 laid emphasis on digitization of basic court infrastructure and over 14,000 district and subordinate courts were computerized. During this phase LAN, hardware and software were installed in most courts and laptops were provided to more than 14000 judicial officers. Then expansion and connectivity issues were addressed in Phase II and 18,735 district and subordinate courts were computerized. The launch of the National Judicial Data Grid which provided online access to case data, orders and judgments was highlighted. The innovations in Phase III were discussed and introduction of digital and paperless courts and full digitization of legacy records was highlighted.

The need of building a digital public infrastructure was emphasized and ensuring accessible court websites was highlighted. The POUR principles i.e. perceivable, operable, understandable and robust were explained. The issue that where we have reached with digitalization was discussed and 24/7 on court project in Kollam district in Kerala, model digital family court in Kollam district and Wayanad paperless courts project were highlighted. The progress in the e-payment facility in the judiciary was shared and WhatsApp integration with case management system was explained. The Mobile E-Sewa Kendra of Kerala was also demonstrated. The issues related to integrating AI in legal aid services for inclusion were discussed.

Session 2: Effective use of Technology in Alternate Dispute Resolution

The session was commenced by highlighting the need for alternate dispute resolution [ADR] and various reasons for prioritizing the ADR system were highlighted including reducing delay in court proceedings, reducing high cost of litigation, faster and less formal process and increase in commercial and cross border disputes. Various digital ADR facilities were demonstrated including hybrid and virtual hearing suites, evidence management and presentation, secure cyber-rooms and smart administrative facility. The mediation centers and their architecture was focused upon and use of technology in mediation centers including silent mediator call buttons, collaborative digital whiteboards, confidential whisper channels and AI-Scribe for summaries were explained.

The transformative contributions of ADR in justice delivery were discussed which included expedited justice delivery where ADR significantly reduces delays and ensures timely resolution of disputes, economic efficiency in dispute resolution which minimizes litigation expenses and promotes cost-effective justice, procedural flexibility which allows parties to customize procedures, timelines, and the choice of neutral experts, confidential and private proceedings which protects sensitive personal and commercial information, party-centric approach which emphasizes autonomy, participation, and mutual decision-making by the parties, decongestion of courts which reduces the judicial backlog and improves institutional efficiency, expert-led decision making which enables appointment of subject-matter specialists as arbitrators or mediators and global compatibility which facilitates resolution of international and cross-border disputes through universally accepted mechanisms.

The discussion then focused on strategies to remove hurdles in the successful implementation of ADR system focusing on issues such as mindset of litigants, absence of incentives, reluctance of lawyers, lack of awareness about mediation, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient training and capacity building. The Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) was highlighted and it was stated that ODR arose from the combination of ADR and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) of the digital era. It uses technology to help people resolve their disputes in an easier and more efficient way than traditional methods. Various features of ODR system were explained including technology enabled ADR where ODR serves as an extension of ADR that operates through digital platforms and online technologies, multichannel communication where it uses various communication tools such as emails, online portals, messaging systems, and virtual meeting platforms to facilitate interaction between disputing parties and digital case management where ODR platforms integrate case management systems for efficient handling of documents, scheduling, and monitoring dispute proceedings.

The global applications of ODR and key areas where ODR is used worldwide were highlighted including consumer disputes where the EU ODR Platform allows consumers to file complaints online against traders across EU countries. Mexico's Concilianet platform enables online consumer complaint resolution through conciliation, insurance disputes where platforms like Cybersettle use automated systems and blind bidding techniques to facilitate settlement of insurance claims, intellectual property & domain name disputes where WIPO's UDRP system resolves domain name disputes through cost-effective online arbitration, E-Commerce disputes where South Korea's Electronic Commerce Mediation Committee conducts mediation through online applications, chat, or video conferencing, online tribunals where Canada's Civil Resolution Tribunal (CRT) handles small claims, property disputes, and low-value claims entirely online and cross-border commercial disputes where the APEC ODR framework helps MSMEs resolve cross-border B2B disputes using accredited online dispute resolution providers.

The discussion then focused on the issue of what is the need for ODR system in India and various factors emphasizing the need of ODR system in India were discussed. The legal framework for ODR system in India was discussed and various judgments of the Supreme Court were referred in this regard. The governing principles of ODR system were highlighted including principles of natural justice, accountability, timely justice and accessibility and inclusivity. The discussion then took into account various initiatives taken in India to promote ODR system and National Centre for Dispute resolution and Online Consumer Mediation Centre were discussed. The National Internet Exchange of India, E-Courts mission mode project, e-Lok Adalat and private initiatives which promoted ODR in India were also discussed. Various challenges in developing the effective online dispute resolution in India were discussed including lack of awareness, technical difficulties, security concerns, legal framework, trust issues, accessibility issues, implementation issues and cultural and linguistic differences. The digital transformation at Madras High Court Arbitration Centre was discussed and various factors for its success were highlighted. The judicial guidelines for online proceedings as framed in C.R.P.(PD).Nos. 4073 & 4227 of 2024, Madras High Court were explained.

Session 3: Electronic and Digital Media: Role of Courts

The session was commenced with discussion on Article 19 (1) A of the Constitution dealing with the right to freedom of speech and expression and evolution of this right from printing press to digital screen was highlighted. It was stated that new digital platforms have broken traditional barrier in information sharing and these platforms offer many challenges including fake news and defamatory and harmful content. Section 66 of the Information Technology Act and the judgment *Shreya Singhal vs. Union of India* 2015 (5) SCC 1 were referred to discuss the regulatory framework on the content on digital platforms and the role of courts in regulating digital platforms and curbing harmful content was highlighted.

It was observed that courts have balanced right to freedom of speech and expression with privacy of individuals and it was stated that surveillance of data should not violate fundamental rights. The issue of fake news and information on digital platforms was discussed and it was stated that citizens should post information only after verifying facts. The issues regarding reporting of orders and judgments of courts were discussed and it was stated that false and unverified reporting in this regard can attract provisions of contempt of court. The judgment *Aswini Kumar Ghose vs Arabinda Bose* AIR1953SC75 and *Romesh Thappar vs State of Madras* AIR 1950 SC 124 were referred. The reasonable restrictions as mandated by Article 19 (2) of the Constitution were discussed and the judgment *Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India* AIR 2020 SC 1308 was referred in this regard.

The discussion then focused on comparison between legacy media and social media platforms. The Madrid Principles 1994 were discussed which states that freedom of expression is fundamental to a democracy and the media's right to comment on the administration of justice shall not be subject to any special restrictions. The media reporting of the sensational cases was discussed and the responsibility of media with regard to sharing of information and respecting privacy of parties was emphasized. The issues related to trial by media were discussed and various judgments of the Supreme Court including *Sidhartha Vashisht @ Manu Sharma vs State (NCT of Delhi)* 2008 (5) SCC 230, *Santosh Kumar Singh vs. State through CBI* (2010) 9 SCC 747, *Vikas Yadav vs. State of U.P. & Ors.* (2016) 13 SCC 535, *State vs. Sanjeev Nanda* (2012) 8 SCC 450, *Rhea Chakraborty vs. State of Bihar and Ors.* 2020 SCC Online SC 654

and *Mukesh & Others v. State for NCT of Delhi* (2017) 6 SCC 1 were referred in this regard. The session then focused on expectations of media from judiciary and it was stated that both are strong pillars of democracy and vital functioning of both the institutions is necessary for the proper governance. The role of media as fifth state was discussed and various factors which affects media reporting of orders and judgments of courts were highlighted.

Session 4 - Cybercrimes and Digital Forensics

The session comprehensively examined the intersection of technology, cybercrime, and the legal framework governing digital ecosystems, with a particular focus on jurisdictional challenges, intermediary liability, and the admissibility of electronic evidence. It was observed that while technological advancements had significantly enhanced efficiency and connectivity, they had also introduced complex forms of cyber offences and enforcement challenges. The discussion began by situating cybercrime within the broader context of digital transformation, identifying offences as acts involving computers, digital devices, or networks, either as targets or as tools. Various forms of cyber threats, including hacking, ransomware, phishing, denial-of-service attacks, OTP fraud, and cyber-vandalism, were outlined, along with their consequences such as financial loss, data theft, reputational harm, and threats to national security.

The deliberations further highlighted emerging risks associated with artificial intelligence, particularly in the manipulation of digital content and the creation of misleading or defamatory material. It was noted that AI-generated content had blurred the line between authenticity and fabrication, thereby complicating evidentiary assessment. Additionally, the disruption of essential services and the use of digital platforms for unlawful activities were recognized as serious concerns, with potential implications under national security laws.

The discussions also examined the role and liability of intermediaries within the digital ecosystem. It was discussed that intermediaries, including internet service providers, social media platforms, search engines, and cloud service providers, played a critical role in the transmission and hosting of digital content. The concept of “safe harbour” under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act was examined in detail, emphasizing that such protection was conditional upon the exercise of due diligence and compliance with legal obligations. It was highlighted that intermediaries were required to act upon lawful notices, remove or disable access to unlawful content within prescribed timelines, and ensure that they were not complicit in any illegal activity.

The session also traced the evolution of intermediary guidelines, particularly the introduction of stricter compliance requirements through subsequent amendments. The reduction in takedown timelines and the imposition of obligations to address synthetically generated information were identified as key developments aimed at mitigating the rapid spread of harmful content. However, practical challenges faced by law enforcement agencies were also discussed, including delays in intermediary responses, lack of clear points of contact, non-cooperation by foreign platforms, and procedural complexities arising from multiple compliance mechanisms. It was observed that the misuse of safe harbour protections for economic gain, rather than for safeguarding free speech, undermined accountability and enforcement efforts.

Jurisdictional issues in cybercrime formed another critical area of discussion. It was explained that the borderless nature of the internet posed significant challenges in determining the appropriate forum for adjudication. The concepts of subject-matter jurisdiction, personal jurisdiction, and enforcement jurisdiction were elaborated, along with the evolution from traditional tests to the effects doctrine. It was noted that Indian law had incorporated these principles through provisions such as Section 75 of the Information Technology Act and relevant sections of the penal law, enabling jurisdiction to be established based on the location of the harm or the affected system. Judicial precedents were cited to illustrate that jurisdiction could extend to foreign entities where the consequences of their actions were felt within India. At the same time, the limitations of existing mechanisms, particularly mutual legal assistance treaties, were acknowledged, and the need for enhanced international cooperation was emphasized.

The session also addressed procedural aspects relating to content regulation, including the requirement of court orders or government notifications for takedown actions. It was clarified that, in line with constitutional principles, intermediaries were obligated to act upon valid legal directions rather than arbitrary complaints, thereby maintaining a balance between freedom of expression and regulatory control. Judicial pronouncements were noted to have reinforced that due diligence requirements did not amount to censorship but were necessary to ensure lawful conduct in the digital space.

A detailed discussion was undertaken on the admissibility and appreciation of electronic evidence. The principles of relevance, admissibility, and proof were identified as fundamental to the evaluation of such evidence. Section 65B of the Evidence Act was recognized as the cornerstone of admissibility, requiring certification for the use of secondary electronic records. The evolution of judicial interpretation was traced through key decisions, which initially permitted flexibility but later mandated strict compliance with certification requirements. Subsequent clarifications reaffirmed the importance of the certificate while also acknowledging practical challenges in its application. Reference was made to the judgments in *Arjun Panditrao Khotkar v. Kailash Kushanrao Gorantyal and others*, (2020) 7 SCC 1, *Anvar PV v. P.K. Basheer and Ors.*, (2014) 10 SCC 473, and *Shafhi Mohammad v. The State of Himachal Pradesh*, (2018) 2 SCC 801.

Emerging evidentiary concerns were also highlighted, particularly in relation to cloud-stored data, encrypted communications, and cryptocurrency-based transactions. The absence of clear mechanisms for certifying cloud-based evidence and the limitations posed by end-to-end encryption were identified as significant gaps in the current framework. Furthermore, the rise of AI-generated evidence raised concerns about authenticity and the potential misuse of fabricated content in legal proceedings. It was observed that existing laws did not adequately address these developments, necessitating urgent legislative and policy interventions.

The discussion also brought attention to practical enforcement challenges, including inter-state coordination issues, delays in freezing financial transactions, and the complexity of tracing cybercriminals operating across multiple jurisdictions. While initiatives such as centralized cybercrime portals and financial tracking mechanisms had improved response capabilities, limitations persisted in ensuring timely and effective action.

The session underscored the need for a dynamic and balanced legal framework capable of addressing the evolving nature of cybercrime. It was emphasized that while technological innovation must be encouraged, it must be accompanied by robust regulatory mechanisms,

accountability of intermediaries, and adaptive evidentiary standards. The overarching theme highlighted that the borderless character of the internet should not result in a lawless environment, and that legal systems must evolve to ensure both the protection of rights and the effective administration of justice. Reference was made in the course of the discussion to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026 and *Shreya Singhal v. Union Of India*, (2015) 5 SCC 1.

Session 5 - Improving Quality of Adjudication: Emerging and Future Technologies

The session focused on the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain technology within the judicial system, examining their transformative potential and the inherent risks associated with its adoption. It was emphasized that while technology has begun to reshape judicial processes, it must remain a tool that supports, rather than substitutes and supplants human decision-making. The discourse reflected on the importance of measured and responsible adoption of technology. It was highlighted that the effectiveness of AI systems must be evaluated through continuous measurement of accuracy, efficiency, and potential risks. Equally important was the need for judges to develop familiarisation and mastery over these tools.

The discussion then traced the evolution of technological integration in the judiciary under the e-Courts Mission Mode Project through three broad stages: computerization, digitization, and integration of intelligent systems. Initially, computers were used for administrative tasks such as maintaining registers and generating cause lists. This progressed to digitization, with initiatives like e-filing, virtual hearings, and digital case records, particularly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current phase, characterized by adoption of intelligent systems, involved the use of AI to analyse data, identify patterns, and assist in decision-making processes. This transition was described as not merely incremental but transformative in redefining how judicial institutions function and establish trust.

Significant attention was devoted to the practical applications of AI within the judicial system. AI tools were noted to assist in courtroom transcription through automatic speech recognition, multilingual translation of judgments, e-filing scrutiny by identifying defects, and legal research by organizing and extracting relevant materials. Additionally, AI-enabled systems could summarize lengthy case records, identify relevant precedents, and support case flow management by prioritizing urgent matters. These applications were recognized as valuable in reducing procedural burdens and improving efficiency, thereby enabling judges to focus on substantive adjudication.

However, the speakers consistently underscored the limitations of AI. It was explained that AI operates primarily through pattern recognition and probabilistic predictions based on historical data, rather than genuine reasoning or understanding. As such, AI-generated outputs, though often coherent, were not inherently reliable or authoritative. The “black box” nature of many AI systems, where the underlying reasoning processes remain opaque, raised concerns regarding transparency and accountability. Unlike human reasoning, which can be scrutinized and challenged, algorithmic outputs may lack explainability, thereby complicating judicial review and undermining procedural fairness.

A central theme of the discussion was the risk of algorithmic bias. It was noted that AI systems trained on historical data could perpetuate existing social and structural inequalities. In contexts such as bail decisions, sentencing, and risk assessment, predictive analytics could replicate discriminatory patterns under the guise of objectivity. The speakers highlighted structural concerns, including invisible value judgments embedded in algorithms, the application of group-based probabilities to individuals, and the absence of neutral datasets. These factors were identified as potentially incompatible with constitutional guarantees of fairness, equality, and individualized justice.

The discussion also addressed due process concerns arising from the use of AI. It was emphasized that judicial decisions must be reasoned and transparent, allowing parties to understand and challenge the basis of outcomes. Reliance on opaque AI systems could undermine these principles, particularly if judges were unable to fully explain or verify algorithmic outputs. Instances were cited where improper reliance on AI-generated content, including fabricated legal citations, had led to judicial errors and professional misconduct. These examples reinforced the need for rigorous verification and the non-delegable responsibility of legal professionals to ensure accuracy.

In response to these challenges, the speakers proposed several guiding principles for the use of AI in the judiciary. *Firstly*, human oversight must remain absolute, with judges retaining full responsibility for all decisions. *Secondly*, AI was to be confined to assistive and administrative functions rather than substantive adjudication. *Thirdly*, transparency in the use of AI tools was deemed essential to preserve procedural fairness. *Fourthly*, institutional training was noted to be critical to equip legal professionals with the skills necessary to engage with emerging technologies responsibly.

The session also explored the role of blockchain technology as a complementary innovation. Blockchain was described as a decentralized and immutable system for recording transactions, offering enhanced security, transparency, and resistance to tampering. Its potential applications in the judicial context included land registration, maintenance of official records, verification of evidence, and management of administrative processes. By providing time-stamped and cryptographically secured records, blockchain could address issues of fraud, duplication, and inefficiency. However, concerns were also raised regarding its implications for privacy, particularly in light of the right to be forgotten. The immutable nature of blockchain records could conflict with individuals' rights to erasure of personal data. Additional challenges included jurisdictional complexities arising from decentralized data storage and the risks associated with handling sensitive information, such as juvenile records.

Global experiences were discussed to illustrate both the opportunities and safeguards associated with AI adoption. Examples from various jurisdictions demonstrated the use of AI in case management, document drafting, and backlog reduction. Notably, systems employing explainable AI were highlighted for their ability to provide transparent and context-sensitive outputs, thereby enhancing user trust. At the same time, international frameworks and ethical guidelines emphasized principles such as non-discrimination, data protection, transparency, and human control.

The session concluded with a reiteration that technology, while powerful, could not replace the human essence of justice. Judicial decision-making was described as inherently human, requiring empathy, discretion, ethical judgment, and an understanding of nuanced social contexts. AI and blockchain could assist in verifying data, organizing information, and

streamlining processes, but they lacked the capacity to interpret evidence or determine equitable outcomes. The ultimate responsibility for justice, therefore, remained with human judges.