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Nyaya Setu AI Chatbot – DISHA Programme and Access to Justice

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Nyaya Setu AI Chatbot — DISHA Programme and Access to Justice

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On this Page

- 01 Why in News
- 02 What is Nyaya Setu?
- 03 BHASHINI Platform
- 04 Access to Justice — The Problem
- 05 DISHA Programme
- 06 Legal Aid Framework — Constitutional Basis
- 07 UPSC Relevance
- 08 Facts Corner

WHY IN NEWS

Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan launched the **Nyaya Setu** AI chatbot and its mascot “**Dishika**” on April 1, 2026, under the **DISHA (Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice)** programme of the Department of Justice. The platform aims to make legal information accessible to ordinary citizens in their native languages through voice and text.

WHAT IS NYAYA SETU?

Nyaya Setu (meaning “Bridge to Justice”) is a multilingual conversational AI chatbot that:

- Helps citizens understand their **legal rights** in simple language
- Explains **court procedures**, filing processes, and legal timelines
- Guides users to **appropriate legal aid services** (NALSA, state LSAs, etc.)
- Provides initial **legal consultation** without requiring lawyer fees

- Works via **voice and text** in Indian languages

FEATURE	DETAIL
Developer	Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD), Dept. of Electronics & IT
Programme	DISHA (Dept. of Justice, Ministry of Law & Justice)
Text languages	36
Voice languages	23
Technology	BHASHINI ASR + multilingual NLP + conversational AI
Mascot	“Dishika” — a friendly digital guide for first-time users

BHASHINI PLATFORM

BHASHINI (Bhasha Interface for India) is India’s national language translation mission aimed at making digital services accessible in Indian languages:

- Provides open-source AI tools for **Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)**, translation, and text-to-speech in Indian languages
- Covers all 22 Scheduled Languages under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution
- Used across government portals, legal services, healthcare, and agricultural platforms
- Nyaya Setu uses BHASHINI’s ASR to convert voice inputs into text for legal queries

ACCESS TO JUSTICE — THE PROBLEM

India faces a profound **justice access gap**:

INDICATOR	DATA
Pending cases in courts	~5 crore (50 million) as of 2025
Lawyers per lakh population	~12 (compared to ~39 in UK)
Legal aid awareness	Very low, especially in rural areas
Cost of legal representation	Prohibitively expensive for most
Language barrier	Most legal documents in English; majority of India speaks regional languages

DISHA PROGRAMME

The **DISHA** programme (Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice) is a Department of Justice initiative to:

- ❶ Bridge the digital and linguistic divide in legal access
- ❷ Integrate AI, vernacular language tools, and legal aid networks
- ❸ Complement **NALSA** (National Legal Services Authority) infrastructure
- ❹ Support the constitutional mandate under **Article 39A** (free legal aid for poor)

LEGAL AID FRAMEWORK — CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

PROVISION	CONTENT
Article 39A	Directs state to ensure equal justice and free legal aid for poor (DPSP)
Article 21	Right to life includes right to fair trial and legal representation (SC in Hussainara Khatoon, 1979)
Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987	Establishes NALSA + State/District Legal Services Authorities
NALSA	Provides free legal services to weaker sections — SC/ST, women, children, disabled, etc.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — Governance and Social Justice:

- Access to justice as a component of rule of law
- Role of technology in making governance inclusive
- BHASHINI, DigiLocker, and language AI as tools of Digital India
- Constitutional provisions: Articles 39A, 21, 14 (equality before law)
- NALSA vs. Nyaya Setu: institutional vs. AI-assisted legal aid

UPSC RELEVANCE

“While AI legal chatbots like Nyaya Setu can democratize information access, they cannot replace the human judgment, advocacy, and institutional accountability that genuine access to justice demands.”

FACTS CORNER

- **Article 39A:** Added by 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976; part of Directive Principles
- **Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979):** SC held that speedy trial is a fundamental right under Article 21
- **NALSA:** National Legal Services Authority; chaired by the Chief Justice of India; 1987 Act
- **8th Schedule languages:** 22 scheduled languages; BHASHINI covers all of them
- **DIBD:** Digital India BHASHINI Division, under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)
- **Pending cases milestone:** India’s courts crossed 5 crore pending cases — a governance crisis requiring both infrastructure and tech solutions
- **Legal services eligible persons:** BPL families, women, SC/ST, children, victims of trafficking, industrial workmen, persons with disabilities

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