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All India Judges Association v. Union of India (2025 INSC 735)

-MANIMARAN SARAVANAN

INTRODUCTION

All India Judges Association and Others v. Union of India (2025 INSC 735) is a case which changed the fate of the young aspirants of judicial exams. This writ was originally filed in the year of 1989 and the final judgement came in the 20 May 2025. This case comes under the inherent or original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Including this case there are totally six (6) AIJS cases. These cases are very important because they emphasize infrastructure & facilities of courts, quality of judges, pay scale, uniformity in service conditions, judicial independence and strengthening of subordinate judiciary etc... It was concerned about qualification, selection, and promotion of aspirants who had the desire of entering judicial services as a civil judge or higher judicial services.

The prayers asked in the I.A's are as follows,

- Method of regular promotion (Objective Suitability Test).
- The promotion is strictly based on merit through competitive examination for the post of district judges.
- To restore the LDCE (Limited Department Competitive Examination) quota to 25% for the post of district judges.
- To fully utilize the LDCE (Limited Department Competitive Examination), by amending the LDCE eligibility conditions for all States & Union territories

FACTS

In the 3rd AIJA case¹, the LDCE quota was 25% but in 4th AIJA case², the quota was reduced to 10% and once again in 6th AIJA case (in 2025) the percentage quota was restored to 25%.

In *All India Judges Association and Others v. Union of India (2002) 4 SCC 247*, three (3) years of practice is necessary for eligibility for Judiciary exam was supported and judgement was given in favour of that but later this was overruled by the *All India Judges Association and Others v. Union of India (2010) 15 SCC 170*. In this case the following reasons were given for the challenge-reduced pool of eligible candidates, recruitment delays, discouraged talented fresh graduates, highly meritorious candidates were excluded due to the 3 years of practice eligibility. As a result the court overruled the requirement of three years of practice and to maintain the quality of judges' strict rigorous judicial training was asked to implement.

Now again the judgement was challenged and the three-judge bench which includes Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, Justice Augustine George Masih, Justice K. Vinod Chandran heard the case.

ISSUES

The court framed eight issues, including:

1. Whether the 25% LDCE quota should be restored.
2. Whether the qualifying service period for LDCE should be reduced.
3. Should merit-based promotions be introduced from Junior to Senior Civil Judge?
4. What percentage and experience would apply to such promotions?
5. Should LDCE quotas be based on cadre strength or annual vacancies?
6. Whether a suitability test should supplement the 65% merit-cum-seniority promotion route.
7. Should the 3-year practice requirement for Civil Judge exams be reinstated?
8. If so, whether practice should be counted from provisional enrolment or AIBE qualification.

¹ All India Judges' Association v. Union of India, (2002) 4 SCC 247.

² All India Judges' Association v. Union of India, (2010) 15 SCC 170.

PETITIONER'S ARGUMENTS

The subject of matter in this case concerns with LDCE and minimum years of experience for eligibility. Petitioner side (All India Judges Association & others) argued that minimum practice is required to make sure that the aspirants or candidates understand court proceedings and ensure that they know proper etiquette in courtroom. This also make sure that they have judiciary temperament to do their duty³. Even though not a proper survey conducted, according to the affidavit filed by High Courts and State Government, judgement given by fresh graduates are not satisfactory or better in quality. This is the result of mismatch in reality and theory. It also argued that, it must be implemented uniformly in all states.⁴

Petitioner urged the court to restore 25% quota for LDCE for District Judges to encourage internal merit based promotions in judicial system⁵ and also to reduce the service eligibility criteria to those who appearing for LDCE to 3 years in senior civil judge and 7 years of total judicial service to provide faster carrier progression to talented and meritorious candidates. It was also argued that promotion should be based on cadre strength to ensure fairness and consistency. Argued that transparent, merit-based tests should be mandatory for LDCE selections to avoid arbitrary or purely seniority-based promotions.⁶

DEFENDENT'S ARGUMENTS

The respondents, including the Union of India and several High Courts, supported rational reforms in the LDCE system but stressed administrative feasibility and judicial discipline. They agreed that promoting deserving officers through LDCE is essential but cautioned against abrupt quota changes that might disrupt cadre balance. They backed the restoration of the 25% quota for District Judges to promote efficiency and motivation in service. However, they emphasized that any eligibility relaxation, such as reducing years of service, should still ensure judicial maturity and competence. They supported the inclusion of suitability tests in merit-cum-seniority promotions to maintain quality standards. Regarding the calculation of quotas, they accepted that computing LDCE vacancies based on cadre strength rather than annual

³ *All India Judges' Ass'n v. Union of India*, (2025) 7 SCC 354, ¶¶ 54–80 (India); see also *BharatLaw.ai*, SC restores 3-year bar practice requirement, <https://www.bharatlaw.ai/post> (last visited July 11, 2025).

⁴ Id. ¶ III.3 (regarding uniform application across states); see also <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/17802623> (last visited July 8, 2025).

⁵ Id. ¶¶ III.1–2 (restoring 25% LDCE quota; setting experience requirement of 3 years in Senior Division and 7 years overall).

⁶ Id. ¶ III.3 (on introducing transparent, objective suitability tests for LDCE promotions).

openings would provide consistency. Overall, the respondents sought a balanced approach that combined merit-based advancement with practical service requirements to ensure the integrity and smooth functioning of the judicial promotion system.

JUDGMENT

The Hon'ble Supreme Court gave the following direction after hearing the arguments from both sides. The quota for LDCE Senior Civil Judge to District Judge is increased to 25% and the minimum service required for qualification of promotion through LDCE is 3 years as civil judge (Senior Division)⁷ and it is also same for promotion of junior civil judge except for 10% quota is reserved in LDCE. Totally 7 years of minimum service is required⁸ which will include both service rendered as a junior civil judge and senior civil judge. If the post reserved for LDCE remains vacant then it must be filled as per merit-cum-seniority in that particular year. It is also directed that the vacancies for LDCE must be calculated on the basis of cadre strength.⁹ Hon'ble court also directed to frame fresh rules¹⁰ or amending the existing rules while keeping it in mind various factors which includes updated knowledge of law, quality of judgement given, ACR's of the judicial officer & disposal rates in these 5 years and performance in viva voice. 1 year mandatory training¹¹ for all judicial appointees and for the entry level judiciary exam (Civil Judge Junior Division) 3 years of practice is required for eligibility. The practice experience for the aspirant of civil judge junior division is calculated from the date of their provisional registration or registration with state bar council.¹²

PRINCIPLES EVOLVED

Following principles are evolved through this judgement,

- Restoration of LDCE quota from 10% to 25% for higher judiciary service based on merit.
- Minimum of 3 years of practice for eligibility for civil judge junior division.
- Emphasizing cadre strength rather than just filling up the vacancies for consistency and fairness.

⁷ Id. ¶ 29

⁸ Id. ¶ 29

⁹ Id. ¶ 48

¹⁰ Id. ¶¶ 49–52

¹¹ Id. ¶ 55

¹² Id. ¶ 53

- 10% quota for promotion from civil judge junior division to civil judge senior division with minimum of 3 years as an eligibility through LDCE.
- Varieties of criteria was set for the suitability test to select a qualified candidate.
- 1 year mandatory training for the candidates to make them ready for taking on their judicial duty.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Through this decision, the hon'ble Supreme Court has emphasized meritocracy which will strengthen the judiciary and also creates an opportunity for the talented judges. 3 years of practice requirement will ultimately produce better quality judgements as they are exposed to court procedure. The structured promotion based on merit will allow transparency and prevent favouritism. One year mandatory training will make sure that the candidates are well equipped with the demands of the judicial office.

This judgement also has few disadvantages. For example, fresh law graduates and the currently studying 5th year students. 3 years of practice discourages them. Even though this strengthens judiciary, it makes their young talents go to waste. Emphasis on exams may not be the perfect solution as it favours the exam crackers and it does not mean that those who clear these exams will give a better quality judgement. This will put more pressure on the candidates as they have to focus on the 3 years of their practice as well as prepare for LDCE. Tight regulations is needed to prevent malpractice or inconsistency in certification of 3 years of practice. So, we need to consider these drawbacks too.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Supreme Court ruling in *All India Judges Association v. Union of India*¹³ marks a key moment in the ongoing development of judicial reforms in India. By restoring the LDCE quota, bringing back the three-year bar practice requirement, and requiring suitability tests and training, the Court reaffirmed its commitment to merit, integrity, and excellence in the judiciary. This decision of the Supreme Court balances the experience and talents of the young minds to make sure that only those who have experienced in proceedings can enter into the judicial services.

¹³ *All India Judges Association v. Union of India* (2025 INSC 735)

Even though it answers the long term challenges such as quality of judgement and meritorious candidates, it remains silent for short term problems such as over reliance on exams, discouragement of fresh graduates and uncertainty in the authentication of 3 years of practice. In the end, the judgment is not just about eligibility or quotas; it's about making sure the judiciary upholds constitutional values and professional skills. If this is executed properly then it will not only strengthen the foundation of the judicial system but also elevate the dignity of judges.

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