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Grievance Redressal: RTI, Tribunals and Civil Society

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Grievance Redressal: RTI, Tribunals and Civil Society

Say a government office rejects your claim, or will not tell you why a project was cleared. What can you actually do? India built several tools for this. They are the RTI Act, tribunals, rules checked by Parliament, and online complaint portals.

Must know: RTI and tribunals

1 What does the RTI Act let a citizen do?

For years, Indian officials kept most files closed by default. The Right to Information Act of 2005 changed that rule. Any citizen can now ask a "public authority" for information. The authority must answer, or refuse for a reason the Act allows.

Who counts as a public authority?

The Act gives a wide definition. A body set up by the Constitution counts. So does a body set up by a law of Parliament or a State legislature. A body owned, controlled or substantially financed by the government counts too. An NGO that is substantially financed by public funds is covered as well.

How fast must an officer reply?

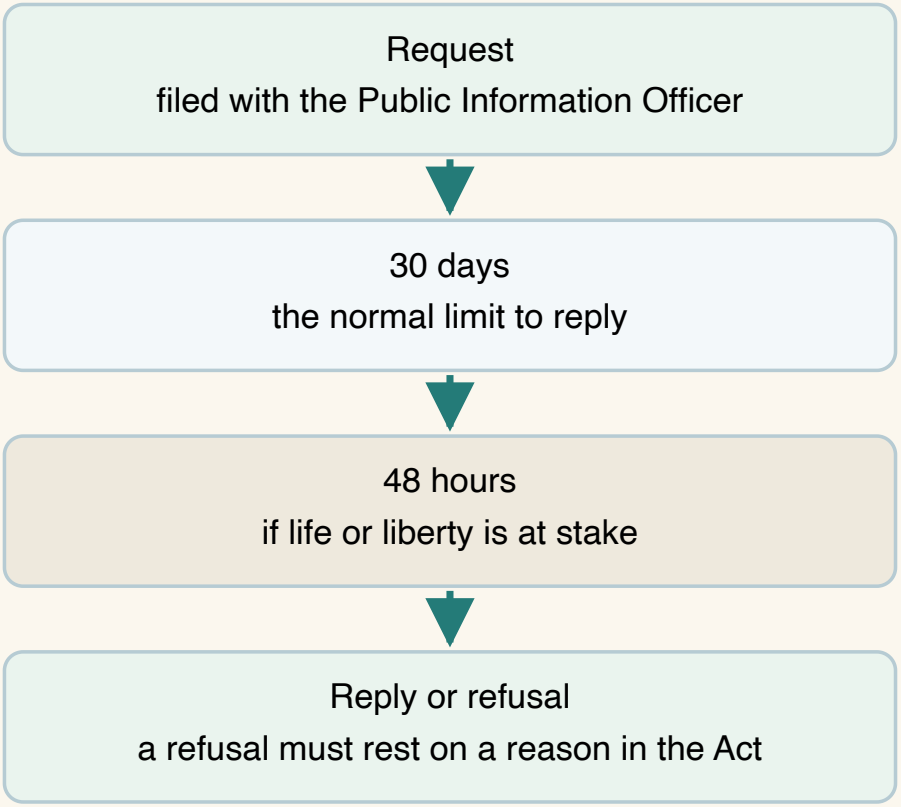
- The Public Information Officer must reply within thirty days of getting the request.
- If the information concerns the life or liberty of a person, the limit is forty-eight hours.

- The officer may charge a prescribed fee. The time spent waiting for that fee does not count.

Has this been asked before?

Yes. The old version of this lesson warned about the year trap. The Act is of 2005, not 2004.

> **Quick check 1.** A body that is substantially financed by the government can count as a public authority under the RTI Act. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓



Two clocks: thirty days, and forty-eight hours for life and liberty. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: cic.gov.in; dopt.gov.in; en.wikipedia.org

2 What can you do if the answer is no, or never comes?

A refusal is not the end. The Act gives a two-step appeal. Silence also counts. If the officer fails to decide in time, the Act treats it as a refusal. You can then appeal.

What is the first appeal?

You file it with an officer senior in rank to the Public Information Officer. This officer sits in the same public authority. You have thirty days from the refusal, or from the day the reply was due.

What is the second appeal?

It goes to the Central Information Commission or a State Information Commission. You have ninety days. The Commission may accept a late appeal if you had sufficient cause.

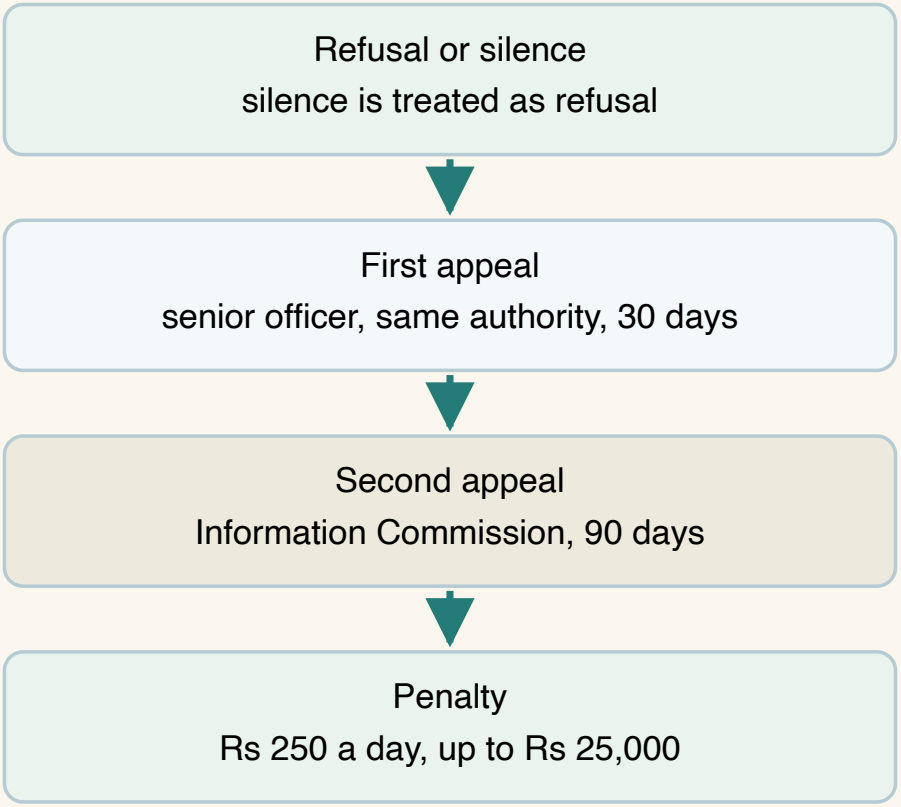
Can an officer be punished?

Yes. The Commission can fine an officer who refused a request without good reason. The fine is two hundred and fifty rupees for each day of delay. The total cannot exceed twenty-five thousand rupees.

Who picks the Information Commissioners?

The President appoints them. A committee recommends the names. It has three members. They are the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.

> **Quick check 2.** After a refusal, the first appeal under the RTI Act goes straight to the Central Information Commission. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓



Two appeals, each with its own clock. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: cic.gov.in; dopt.gov.in

3 Why does India use tribunals, and what is the CAT?

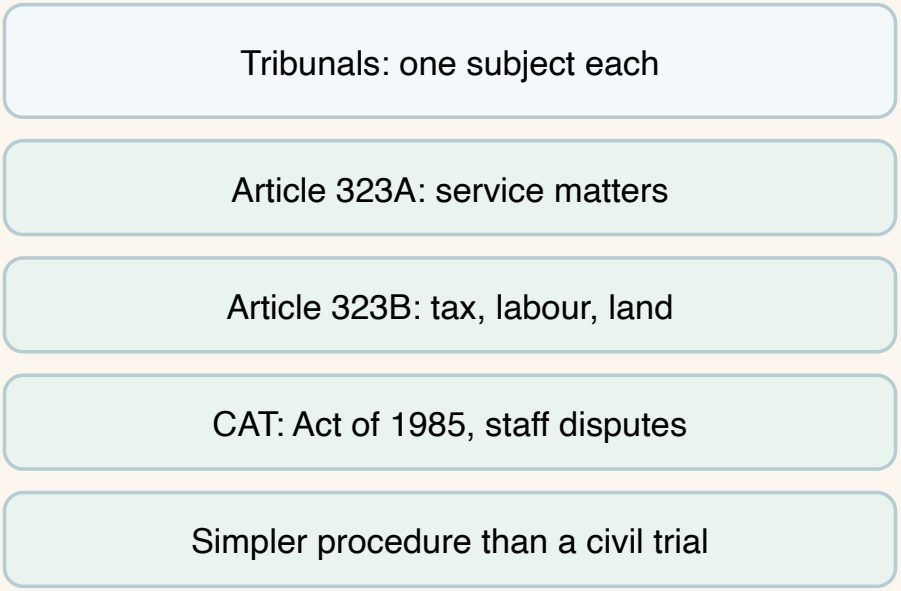
Picture every transfer dispute and every tax appeal in the country queuing in the same court as murder trials. Tribunals were built to avoid that jam. Each handles one kind of dispute. Its members know the subject well. Its procedure is simpler than a full civil trial.

Where does the Constitution allow them?

Article 323A lets Parliament set up administrative tribunals. They decide disputes about recruitment and service conditions of public servants. Article 323B covers other matters, such as tax, foreign exchange, industrial disputes and land reform.

What is the Central Administrative Tribunal?

The Central Administrative Tribunal, or CAT, was set up under the Administrative Tribunals Act of 1985. It decides service disputes of government employees. These include promotions, transfers and discipline. Without it, those cases would pile onto the High Courts.



Narrow, repeat disputes leave the regular courts. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in; en.wikipedia.org

Good to know: limits, rules and review

4 When may an officer refuse an RTI request?

The right to information is wide, but it has limits. Section 8 lists the cases where an officer need not give information. Four examples show the idea.

What are some listed exemptions?

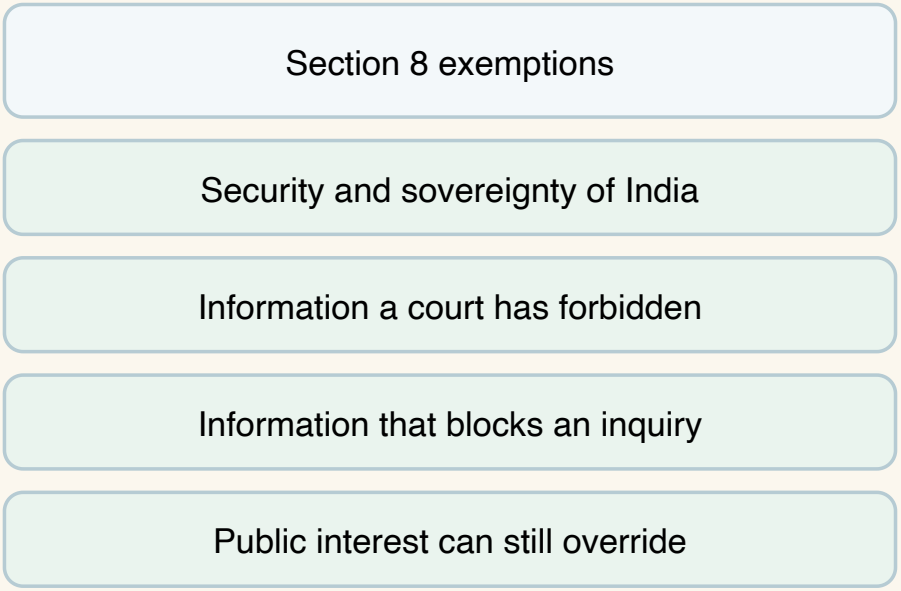
- Information that would harm the sovereignty and integrity of India, or the security of the State.
- Information that a court has expressly forbidden to be published.
- Information that would impede an investigation or the prosecution of offenders.
- Cabinet papers. But the decisions and the reasons for them must be made public once the matter is over.

Can the public interest override an exemption?

Yes. Section 8(2) says a public authority may allow access if the public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm. Section 22 also gives the Act priority over the Official Secrets Act, 1923.

Which bodies are outside the Act?

Section 24 exempts the intelligence and security organisations in the Second Schedule. The Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing are on that list. There is one exception. Information about corruption and human rights violations must still be given.



The right is wide, but not unlimited. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: cic.gov.in; en.wikipedia.org

5 What is delegated legislation, and who watches it?

Parliament cannot write every technical detail of every law. So it passes the law and lets the executive frame the details as rules, regulations and bye-laws. This is delegated legislation. It is also called subordinate legislation.

What is the trade-off?

Rules can be changed fast, without a new vote in Parliament. But rules do not get the full debate that an Act gets. Power shifts toward the executive.

What limits does the Supreme Court set?

The Court has held that the legislature cannot delegate its essential legislative function. That function is choosing the legislative policy and enacting it as a binding rule. Ancillary details may be delegated. The Court has quoted this line from In re Delhi Laws Act, 1951, in later cases such as D. S. Garewal v. State of Punjab.

What is excessive delegation?

In Hamdard Dawakhana v. Union of India, decided on 18 December 1959, the Court struck down some words in a drug-advertising law. Those words let the executive add diseases to the banned list through rules. The Court said that went beyond valid delegation.

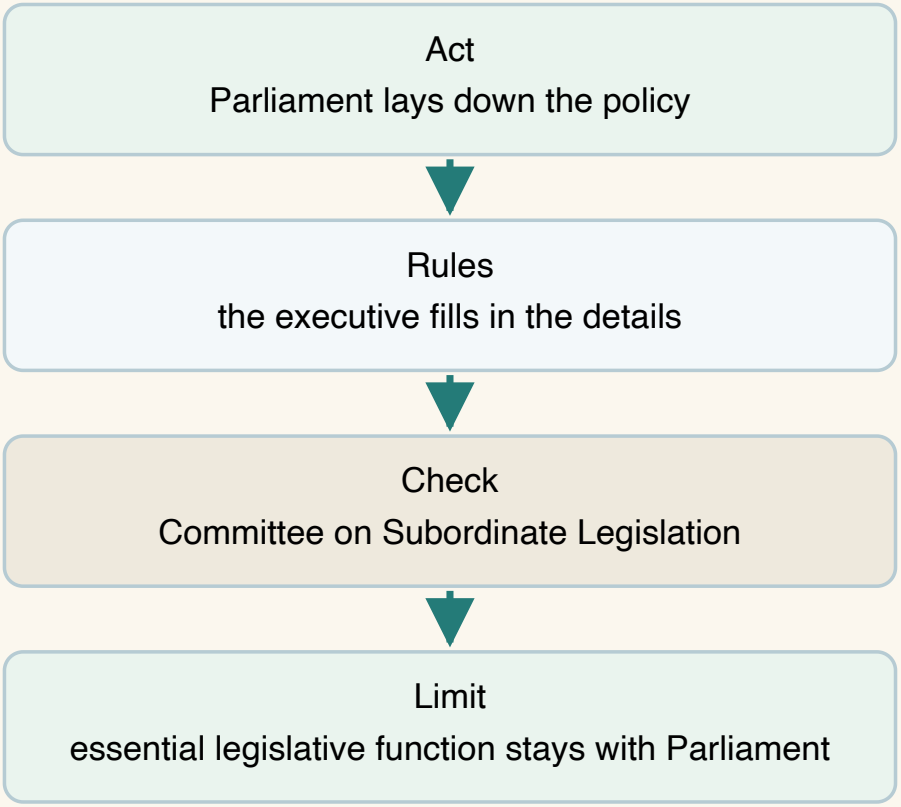
Who checks the rules?

The Committee on Subordinate Legislation of the Lok Sabha was first constituted in December 1953. It scrutinises and reports whether the powers to make rules, regulations and bye-laws are being properly exercised within the delegation.

Has this been asked before?

Yes. The old version of this lesson listed a question on the limit on delegated legislation. The answer is that the legislature cannot delegate its essential legislative functions. That is native Question 1 below.

> **Quick check 3.** Parliament may hand its whole law-making policy to the executive, as long as it passes the Act. *(True or False?)*
>
> See answer ↓



Details may be delegated. Policy may not. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: api.sci.gov.in; sansad.in

6 Are tribunals as independent as courts?

No. In L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997), the Supreme Court ruled on this. It held that tribunals are not final. Their decisions can be tested in the High Court.

What did the Court decide?

- All decisions of tribunals under Articles 323A and 323B are subject to the High Court's writ power under Articles 226 and 227.
- The case is heard by a Division Bench of the High Court in whose area the tribunal sits.
- Clause 2(d) of Article 323A and clause 3(d) of Article 323B were held unconstitutional. They were struck down only to the extent that they shut out the High Courts and the Supreme Court.
- Tribunals continue to act as courts of first instance.



The Supreme Court of India, which decided L. Chandra Kumar in 1997. Photo: Subhashish Panigrahi, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Resized.

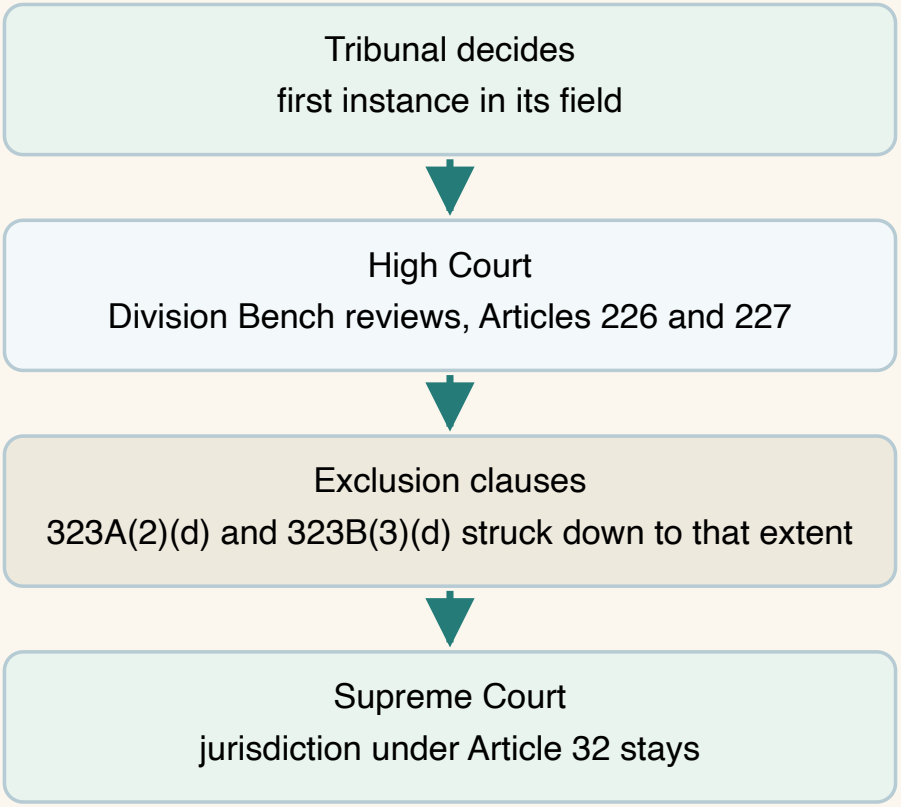
Why did the Court worry about independence?

The judgment records a real concern. The government is a litigant in most cases before a service tribunal. A tribunal that depends on the government may find it hard to look independent.

What does Article 227 add?

It gives every High Court superintendence over all courts and tribunals in its area.

> **Quick check 4.** A tribunal's decision under Article 323A is final and no High Court can test it. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓



Tribunals are courts of first instance, not the last word. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: aphc.gov.in; cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in

7 Where does civil society fit in?

Not everyone can fill in a legal form alone. Civil society groups step in here. They help people write RTI requests and complaints. They also follow up on delays. They are helpers. They do not replace the RTI Act or a tribunal.

Why is this help needed?

Many applications fail on technical grounds. Forms are hard to read. Language is legal. People with little schooling often turn to NGOs, activists or lawyers.

What does NCERT say?

NCERT notes a common complaint. Many people feel there are not enough provisions to make the bureaucracy answerable to citizens. It adds that measures like the Right to Information may make the bureaucracy a little more responsive and accountable.

Where does outside help stop?

It cannot force an answer. If an office simply ignores a request, the citizen still has to use the appeal route.

Sources: ncert.nic.in; en.wikipedia.org

Great to know: online redressal and the toolkit

8 How did CPGRAMS grow, and what is new?

CPGRAMS is the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System. It is a single online portal connected to central ministries, departments, States and Union Territories. A citizen can file a complaint and track it.

What do the numbers show?

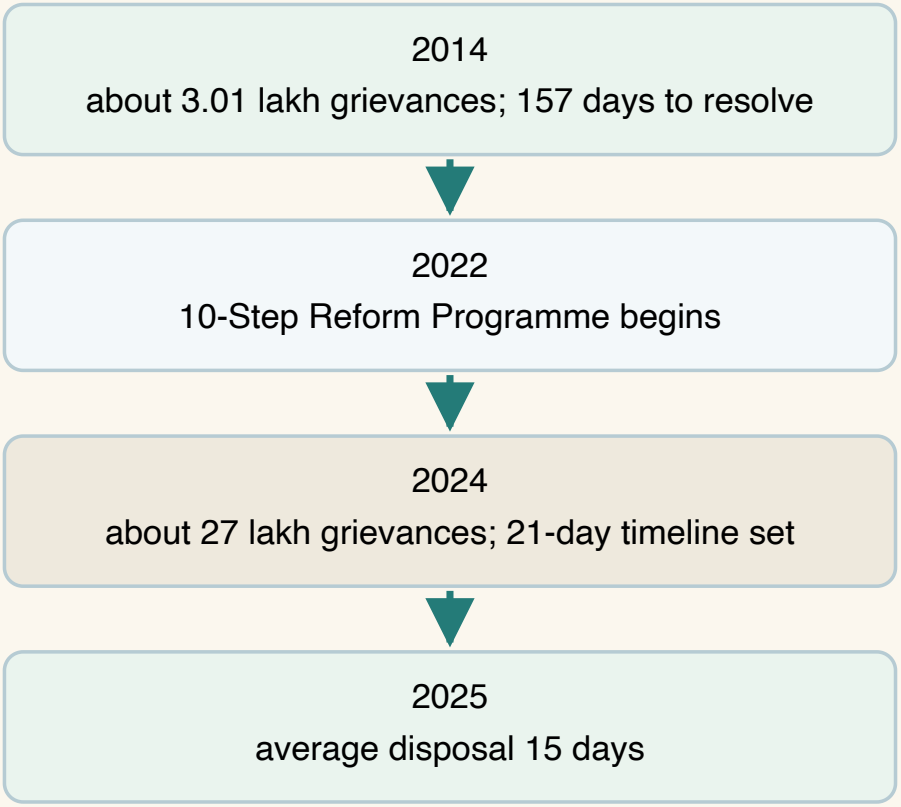
- Grievances handled each year rose nearly nine-fold. They went from about 3.01 lakh in 2014 to about 27 lakh in 2024.
- Average disposal time in central ministries fell from 157 days in 2014 to 15 days in 2025.
- Guidelines of August 2024 cut the prescribed timeline from 30 days to 21 days.

What reforms drove this?

A 10-Step Reform Programme began in 2022, after a review by the Prime Minister. It made CPGRAMS version 7.0 route complaints to the right authority. It also added feedback calls and an appeal option for unhappy citizens.

What is Samadhan Didi?

It is an AI-enabled voice chatbot for CPGRAMS, launched on 30 May 2026. CPGRAMS accepts submissions in 22 scheduled languages as well as English. A NextGen CPGRAMS is under development.



More complaints, faster answers. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: pib.gov.in

9 Which tool fits which problem?

Each tool does a different job. Pick by the type of problem.

What about the SAMADHAN portal?

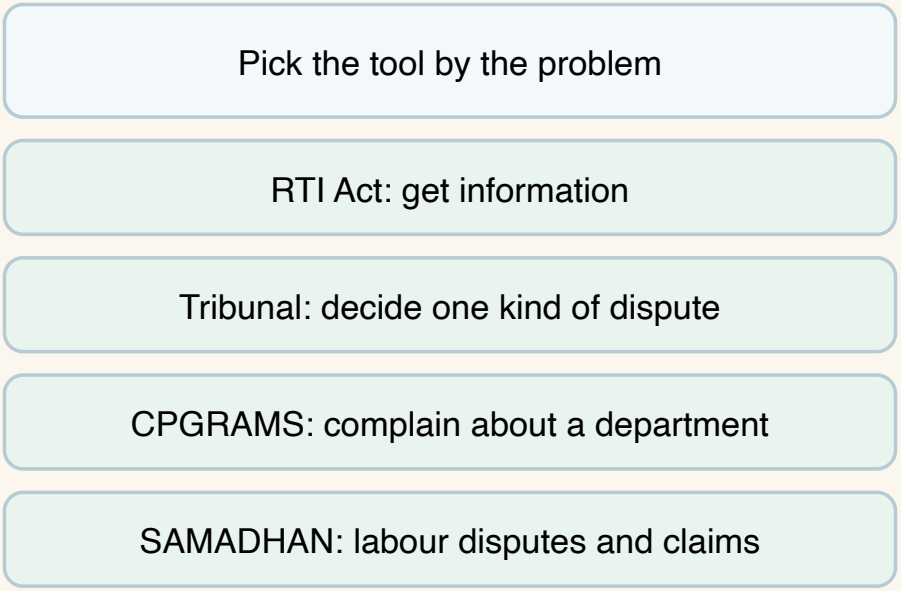
SAMADHAN is a labour-side portal. Workers, employers and trade unions can file industrial disputes online. It also takes claims under several labour laws. These include the Payment of Gratuity Act and the

Minimum Wages Act. Users can track a case online. PIB reported 63,001 complaints on the portal up to 30 June 2024.

How do the tools compare?

- **RTI Act:** getting information from a public authority. Any citizen can use it.
- **Administrative tribunal:** deciding one kind of dispute, such as a service matter. Government employees are the main users.
- **Committee on Subordinate Legislation:** checking rules made under a law. Parliament uses it.
- **CPGRAMS:** filing a complaint against a department. Any citizen can use it.
- **SAMADHAN portal:** industrial disputes and labour claims. Workers, employers and unions use it.

Delegated legislation and tribunals make government faster. They route decisions around Parliament and the regular courts. The price is more power with the executive. Speed against accountability is the theme of this whole topic.



Match the tool to the problem. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: pib.gov.in

Review the feedback after each answer. The understanding-check score lasts for this page session.

Reset the checks when you want another attempt. This score is separate from the Native Practice score below.

Questions to think through

Why does India trade some scrutiny for speed in tribunals and delegated legislation?

Sending every service dispute and every technical rule through Parliament and the regular courts would slow government to a crawl. So India accepts less scrutiny on narrow, technical matters. It claws some

back through appeals, High Court review and the Committee on Subordinate Legislation.

Why did the Court insist that High Courts can review tribunals?

Judicial review is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. A tribunal close to the government may not look neutral. High Court review gives a check from a fully independent court.

Why can a good law like RTI still fail in practice?

The law gives a right to ask. It cannot make every officer reply in full and on time. That is why the appeal route and penalties exist. It is also why people seek help from civil society.

Why did CPGRAMS complaints rise nine-fold?

Filing online removed the old barriers of queues and postage. Anyone with a phone can file. The figures also show growing public trust, as the PIB backgrounder notes.

Practice MCQs

1. Under Indian constitutional law, delegated legislation faces which limitation on the legislature?

A. It cannot exceed one page in length

B. It must be renewed annually

C. It requires unanimous parliamentary approval

D. It cannot delegate its essential legislative functions

See answer ↓

2. Under the RTI Act, information that concerns the life or liberty of a person must be provided within how many hours?

A. 12 hours

B. 48 hours

C. 72 hours

D. 24 hours

See answer ↓

3. A second appeal under the RTI Act lies with the Information Commission within how many days?

A. Thirty days

B. Sixty days

C. Ninety days

D. One hundred and eighty days

See answer ↓

4. Which Article of the Constitution lets Parliament set up administrative tribunals for the service matters of public servants?

A. Article 226

B. Article 323B

C. Article 323A

D. Article 227

See answer ↓

5. In L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997), the Supreme Court held that tribunal decisions are subject to High Court review before which bench?

A. A Division Bench of the High Court

B. A single judge of the Supreme Court

C. A Lok Adalat

D. A committee of Parliament

See answer ↓

6. Which Article gives every High Court superintendence over all courts and tribunals in its area?

A. Article 32

B. Article 136

C. Article 226

D. Article 227

See answer ↓

7. What was the average disposal time of grievances in central ministries on CPGRAMS in 2025?

A. 15 days

B. 157 days

C. 3 days

D. 30 days

See answer ↓

8. Under the RTI Act, the first appeal against a refusal is filed with which authority?

A. The Prime Minister's Office

B. The High Court

C. The Central Information Commission

D. An officer senior in rank to the Public Information Officer

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **D.** The legislature cannot delegate its essential legislative function. That function is choosing the legislative policy and enacting it as a binding rule. Ancillary details may be delegated. A related limit is excessive delegation, as in Hamdard Dawakhana (1959). ↑ Q1
2. **B.** The normal limit is thirty days. Where the information concerns the life or liberty of a person, it must be given within forty-eight hours of the request. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The first appeal goes to a senior officer within thirty days. The second appeal goes to the Central or a State Information Commission within ninety days. The Commission may admit a late appeal for sufficient cause. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** Article 323A lets Parliament provide for administrative tribunals for recruitment and conditions of service. Article 323B covers other matters such as tax and industrial disputes. Article 227 gives High Courts superintendence over tribunals. ↑ Q4
5. **A.** The Court held that decisions of tribunals under Articles 323A and 323B are subject to the High Court's writ power under Articles 226 and 227. These are heard by a Division Bench. The exclusion clauses were struck down only to the extent they shut out the High Courts and the Supreme Court. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** Article 227 gives every High Court superintendence over all courts and tribunals in its area. Article 226 is the writ power. L. Chandra Kumar (1997) held that tribunal decisions are subject to review under both. ↑ Q6
7. **A.** The average disposal time fell from 157 days in 2014 to 15 days in 2025. The prescribed timeline is 21 days, shortened from 30 days by guidelines issued in August 2024. ↑ Q7
8. **D.** The first appeal goes to an officer senior in rank to the Public Information Officer, in the same public authority. The Information Commission hears the second appeal. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** The Act covers bodies owned, controlled or substantially financed by the government. ↑ 1
2. **False.** The first appeal goes to a senior officer in the same public authority. The Commission hears the second appeal. ↑ 2

3. **False.** The legislature cannot delegate its essential legislative function. It may delegate only ancillary details. ↑ 3
4. **False.** L. Chandra Kumar (1997) held tribunal decisions are subject to High Court review under Articles 226 and 227. ↑ 4

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