



Under-staffed consumer courts grapple with pending cases

Despite functioning without vacancies, until a few years ago, no. of cases pending with various panels stood at 16,914 as of Feb 2024. Including appeals, no. is 21,001

ARUN M / P RAMDAS @Kochi

IT TOOK the Ernakulam Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission five years to resolve a complaint filed in 2018 by a senior advocate, who is now a judge of the Kerala High Court. The complainant was seeking compensation from an airline for denying him boarding, citing overbooking. The commission ruled in his favour in February 2023.

Delays and pendency have been the mainstay of both state and district consumer courts. Despite functioning without vacancies, until a few years ago, the number of cases pending with the various panels stood at 16,914 as of February 2024. Including appeals, the number is 21,001.

A notable increase in pendency was reported in 2023, when 6,704 cases remained unresolved. There were 603 complaints and appeals pending from the first two months of 2024.

The highest number of pend-

ing cases is with Thrissur and Ernakulam commissions, at 3,336 and 3,334 respectively, data with the food and civil supplies and consumer affairs department shows.

The other panels with high pendency are Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Kozhikode. There are 657 cases pending with the state commission.

However, according to Shean Jose, a former member of the Ernakulam commission, the actual number of pending cases may be much higher. "The commissions were set up under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, for the speedy resolution of complaints. As per the Act, a complaint should be settled within three months. However, it is impossible in many cases," said Shean. "Vacancies often create delays. These are political appointments. The lack of adequate staff also plays a role," said Shean, who is also president of the Kerala Lawyers Association.

Currently, six positions for

DELAYED JUSTICE

657 cases pending with State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, as of February 12, 2024

Situation in district panels

Thiruvananthapuram - 1,947
Kollam - 1,088
Pathanamthitta - 498
Alappuzha - 367
Kottayam - 435
Idukki - 476
Ernakulam - 3,334
Thrissur - 3,336
Palakkad - 408
Malappuram - 978
Kozhikode - 1,475
Wayanad - 669
Kannur - 573
Kasaragod - 673

Year-wise pending cases and appeals

2020 - 1,496
2021 - 2,000
2022 - 3,187
2023 - 6,704
2024 - 603 (as of Feb 12)



presidents and members are vacant. The Thiruvananthapuram-based Confederation of Consumer Vigilance Centre has obtained an interim order from the HC to allow the presidents and members of the various commissions to continue until the selection process is finalised. The petitioners argued that if these positions remain vacant, there will likely be a further spike in the number of pending cases.

As per records, the Alappuzha commission does not have a president. The state commission is short of two members, while the Kollam, Pathanamthitta,

Idukki, and Kasaragod district commissions each have a member vacant.

According to officials, there has been a considerable increase in number of complaints after the Act came into force. In July 2020, when the Act came into effect, case numbers were low due to the pandemic. But this picked up in the succeeding years.

Currently, department staff are deployed in the various commissions. "Many of them are unaware of the importance of consumer forums. The government should constitute a separate directorate for consumer affairs and bring the commissions under it, Shean said.

Under the Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission Rules, cases for up to ₹5 lakh in compensation don't attract any fees.

Officials with the state commission said the panel holds three-day camps twice a month in Ernakulam. These camps don't have a permanent venue, providing an opportunity for those residing in the interiors to lodge complaints. For the quick settlement of cases, mediation cells have been constituted as part of the Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kannur and Kasaragod commissions.

"Moreover, online sittings, which commenced during the pandemic, are now a permanent feature. It has also put in place a system whereby ordinary complainants can consult legal experts. Complaints can also be lodged online and there is mechanism to check their status as well," an official source said.

The commissions were set up under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, for the speedy resolution of complaints. As per the Act, a complaint should be settled within three months. However, it is impossible in many cases

Shean Jose, president of Kerala Lawyers Association



(From left) Swathi Subramanian, Savita Rajan, Ritu Sara Thomas

Ezha receives honourable mention at Domus Awards

RONNIE KURIAKOSE @Kochi

EZHA, an all-woman team of conservation architects from Kerala, has received an honourable mention at the International Domus Awards 2023 for their efforts in conserving the nearly 600-year-old mandapam at Kunnamangalam Bhagawati Temple near Karuvannur in Kozhikode.

This is the first project from Kerala to receive the honour. According to the jury, "The restoration of the mandapam stood out for the attention paid to the cultural, religious and processual meanings."

On receiving the award, the Ezha team members said, "We are grateful for this recognition — our second on the international stage. This motivates us to accomplish more."

Ezha is made up of Swathi

We are grateful for this recognition — our second on the international stage. This motivates us to accomplish more

Ezha team members

Subramanian, Savita Rajan and Ritu Sara Thomas. Earlier, they had won the UNESCO award for cultural heritage conservation and the Indian Institute of Architects' Golden Leaf award for the same project.

The ninth edition of the Domus Awards, instituted by the University of Ferrara in Italy, also saw Field Architects, a Gujarat-based architecture firm founded by Faiza Khan and Suril Patel, clinch the silver medal for their work in conserving the Palay houses of Old Phey in Ladakh.

Court quashes Santiago Martin's plea in ED case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kochi

THE Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Special Court in Kochi has dismissed the petition of lottery king Santiago Martin to keep the enforcement directorate (ED) case against him in abeyance till the disposal of the trial procedure in the lottery scam case probed by the CBI.

According to Martin, the chargesheet filed by the CBI is the predicate case on the basis of which ED registered a money laundering case against him and others. Citing the Supreme Court judgment in Vijay Madanlal's case that proceedings under PMLA cannot be continued once there is an acquittal or discharge in the predicate case, Martin filed the petition to keep the ED case in abeyance till the final disposal of the CBI case.

During the hearing, the ED objected to the petition, claiming that the petition was filed only to delay the proceedings in the ED case. PMLA court judge P K Mohandas, after hearing both sides, held that both the cases are independent and separate and the court has no power to stay the trial of a case pending before it. Hence the petition of Martin cannot be entertained. Martin was recently in the limelight after his company was the highest buyer of electoral bonds for political parties.

Stuck in strife, NITC switches to online classes

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kozhikode

AS THE student protest continues against the action of the National Institute of Technology Calicut (NITC) authorities in rescheduling the hostel timings on the campus, the classes at the institute have been made online. An NITC circular informed that classes will be held online from March 23 to April 5. Regular classes will start after that and the year-end semester exam will be held on April 17. Online classes have been started for students in undergraduate courses like BTech

and BArch. "The end semester examination will be held in offline mode as per the revised academic calendar for the winter semester from April 17. Academic activities for ITTEP postgraduate and PhD students shall continue as usual," stated a notice issued by A V Babu, Dean (academic), NITC.

The students alleged that online classes were introduced to quell students' stir. According to students, the new order is also a retaliatory measure against the series of protests held by the students on the campus

against the decision to suspend Vysakh Premkumar, a fourth-year BTech student, in January. Action was taken against Vysakh, a Dalit student, for protesting at the celebration programme organised by the Science and Spirituality Club of the campus on January 21, a day before the Ram Temple consecration took place on January 22.

The strike by the students demanding the withdrawal of the suspension of Vysakh received much attention and the authorities later withdrew the order.

Rajanikant G K, Dean (Students' welfare), issued a circular on March 20 imposing a night curfew at the hostel and new time regulations for the canteen that is presently open 24 hours. Later the students intensified their protest on Friday, blocking teachers and staff and disrupting the classes. The latest order to conduct online classes was issued while the students were continuing with their protest in front of the campus. The offers 11 UG programmes and 29 PG programmes, including MBA, and the campus has a total of 6,500 students.



Students of Cotton Hill Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram, in enjoyment mode after their HSC final examinations (Science stream) concluded on Saturday | VINCENT PULICKAL

6 held for death of three in car in Tumakuru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Tumakuru

WITH the police arresting six accused in the case of three people from Belthangady found charred to death in a car on the Kuchangi tank bed, the case is evolving into a fake

gold transaction racket. Auto driver Sahul, 45, of Nada village, Issac, 56, of Madadka, and Intiaz, 34, of Shirilala village were found in the gutted car on Friday. One of the bodies was found in the rear seat and two others in the boot of the car.

The key accused Swami from Tumakuru had allegedly lured the victims with a huge offer of gold at throw-away prices, claiming that he unearthed the gold in a field.

Sources revealed that there was a transaction of ₹1 crore and the victims

were suspected to have paid the amount to the accused to obtain the gold in return.

When they arrived to strike a deal on Thursday, the accused attacked and tied their arms before setting the car on fire and fleeing the scene.

Police arrest rape accused from Sharjah with Interpol's assistance

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kottayam

YAHYA Khan, a 43-year-old man from Vizhinjam in Thiruvananthapuram, has been apprehended by the Kerala Police in Sharjah with the assistance of the Interpol.

Khan, who was proclaimed an international criminal by the Interpol, was arrested for raping a mentally challenged girl in Pala in 2008.

According to the police, Khan, who used to go door-to-door selling pots, visited a house in Pala as part

of the sales. After knowing that the girl with mental disability was alone in the house, he sexually assaulted her.

Though the Pala police initially detained Khan following the incident, he managed to flee after securing bail.

In order to arrest him, a special investigation team was formed under the leadership of the district police chief. During the subsequent search, the police found that he had gone abroad after hiding in Kannur and Malappuram.

To arrest Khan from abroad, the district police chief, K Karthick, submitted a fool-proof report, and based on it, the Interpol declared Khan as an international criminal in January 2024. Subsequently, Khan was arrested by the police from Sharjah with the help of the Interpol.

He was brought to Kochi on Saturday. Pala DySP Sadan K, Pala station sub-inspector Binu V L and SI Biju Kumar (Interpol liaison officer) were also part of the probe team. Khan was produced in court and remanded to judicial custody.

Dhanlaxmi Bank Ltd., Alappuzha Branch
26/1006, Ground Floor, Ramavarma District Club Building, Palace Road, Alappuzha - 688 011

Regional Office: Ernakulam Corporate Office: Thrissur

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Dhanlaxmi Bank Limited Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" on 19.04.2024, Friday for recovery of ₹1,07,67,619.18 (Rupees One Crore Seven Lakh Sixty Seven Thousand Six Hundred Nineteen and Paise Eighteen Only) as on 29.02.2024 due to Dhanlaxmi Bank Ltd, Alappuzha, Secured Creditor from Mr. Neju Joseph and Mrs. Lesa Neju.

The Reserve Price will be Rs. 1,09,00,000.00 (Rupees One Crore Nine Lakh Only) Earnest Money Deposit will be Rs. 10,90,000.00 (Rupees Ten Lakh Ninety Thousand Only)

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7.65 Ares of land with residential building under Sy No.401/4, Re Sy. No.8, Block No.40 of Aryad South Village, Ambalappuzha Taluk, Alappuzha District in the name of Mr. Neju Joseph and all improvements therein within the following boundaries. Boundaries as per location sketch no.3410/14 issued by Village Officer (Aryad South Village) dated 20.08.2014; East: Pathway South: Property of Mr. A Nasser, West: Properties of Mr. Hakeem, North: Road

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Place: Ernakulam Date : 22.03.2024

Authorized Officer Dhanlaxmi Bank Ltd

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