

Brief on eCourts Project

A. eCourts Integrated Mission Mode Project (Phase-I):

The eCourts Integrated Mission Mode Project is one of the national eGovernance projects being implemented in High Courts and district/subordinate Courts of the Country. The project has been conceptualized on the basis of the “National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology in the Indian Judiciary-2005” by the eCommittee of the Supreme Court of India. The eCommittee was formed in 2004 to draw up an action plan for the ICT enablement of the Judiciary with the Patron in Chief-cum-Adhoc Chairman as the Chief Justice of India.

The Government approved the computerization of 14,249 district & subordinate Courts under the project by March 2014 with a total budget of Rs. 935 crore. The objective of the eCourts project is to provide designated services to litigants, lawyers and the judiciary by universal computerization of district and subordinate courts in the country and enhancement of ICT enablement of the justice system.

An Empowered Committee has been constituted under the Chairpersonship of Secretary, Department of Justice, to give strategic direction & guidance to the project. The project is being implemented by National Informatics Centre (NIC). A project monitoring committee comprising of Department of Justice, representatives of eCommittee and NIC meets on a monthly basis to monitor the progress of the project. Steering Committee at each High Court oversee the implementation of the project in their respective High Court.

As on 31st March, 2014, more than 93% of the mandated activities have been completed. Status of implementation as on 31st March, 2014, for main components of the project is given as under:

S. No.	Module	Status as on 31 st March,2014	% Completion
1	Sites funded	14249	100.00
2	Sites readiness	14164	99.40
3	Hardware ordered	14015	98.36
4	Hardware delivery	13464	94.49
5	Hardware installation	13436	94.29
6	LAN ordered	14027	98.44
7	LAN delivery	13403	94.06
8	LAN installation	13318	93.47
9	Software deployment	13227	92.83

In addition to above, ICT infrastructure of the Supreme Court and High Court has also been upgraded. Progress on other activities of the project as of 31st March 2014 is given below:

I. **Laptops to Judicial Officers:** Laptops have been provided to 14,309 judicial officers.

II. **Software:** A unified national core application software - Case Information System (CIS) software - has been developed and made available for deployment at all computerised courts. Entry of data regarding past cases has been initiated, and data in respect of over 3 crore cases is available online.

III. **Judicial Service Centre:** Judicial Service Centre (JSC) have established at all computerised courts which serves as a single window for filing petitions and applications by litigants/ lawyers as also obtaining information on ongoing cases and copies of orders and judgments etc.

IV. **Change Management and Training:** As part of the Change Management exercise, over 14,000 Judicial Officers have been trained in the use of UBUNTU-Linux OS and over 4000 court staff have been trained in CIS software.

V. **Process Re-engineering:** eCommittee has initiated the Process Re-engineering (PR) exercise; PR Committees have been set up in all High Courts to study and suggest simplification in existing rules, processes, procedures and forms.

VI. **Video Conferencing** facilities in courts and jails: A Video Conferencing (VC) pilot has been launched in five districts under the supervision of eCommittee. Based on experience of pilot, VC will be rolled out in 500 locations across the country during Phase-I extension period.

VII. **Service Delivery and National Judicial Data Grid:** The national e-Courts portal (<http://www.ecourts.gov.in>) has become operational. The portal provides online services to litigants such as details of case registration, cause list, case status, daily orders, and final judgments. Currently, litigants can access case status information in respect of over 3 crore pending and decided cases in more than 10,000 courts. NJDG data will also help the judiciary in judicial monitoring and management and the Government to get data for policy purposes.

Against the approved cost of Rs. 935 crore, Rs. 597.35 crore have been released to NIC upto 31.3.2014 for the above components of the eCourts Phase I project. For completing the remaining activities, CCEA on 8th May 2014 has approved the extension of timelines of the Project by one year until 31st March 2015, to be undertaken within the original approved cost of Rs 935 crore.

B. eCourts Phase-II:

In January 2014, eCommittee of the Supreme Court approved Policy and Action Plan Document (hereafter 'Policy Document') for Phase II of the eCourts Project. The proposed initiatives as mentioned in the Policy Document are as below:

1. *Enhancement of computer infrastructure in courts as compared to Phase I:*

In Phase I of the project, 1+3 computers were provided to courts. But experience of Phase I has shown that this number was low for effective and optimum ICT enablement. Considering that computers are used by all important sections of the Court Registry for day to day processes and service delivery, the Policy Document proposes that the hardware be increased to from 1+3 to 2+6 per court. Therefore, 14,249 phase I Courts will be provided an additional 1+3 computers. Further, 8151 new courts which include (a) courts that were set up after the approval of Phase I courts and (b) courts expected to be set up in the first two years of Phase II, will receive hardware in the revised 2+6 configuration.

2. *Strengthening the system of serving notices and summons:* One of the main reasons for long drawn litigation is delays in serving notices and summons. This is proposed to be strengthened through provision of authentication devices for process servers at Court Complexes.

3. *Option of desktops or laptops:* For the computer infrastructure, the Policy Document provides for procurement of either desktop with UPS or special configuration laptop depending upon suitability and economy.

4. *Hardware to District Legal Service Authorities and Taluka Legal Service Committees:* The Legal Aid setup has become an integral part of the justice delivery system. The office of District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) and Taluka Legal Services Committee (TLSC) are required to work in tandem with the Court processes for holding of lok adalats, listing of cases in lok-adalats, the cause lists, proceedings, orders etc. in those cases. This requires the DLSA and TLSC office to be integrated with rest of the Court complex ICT infrastructure. Computer infrastructure is therefore proposed to be provided to DLSAs and TLSCs.

5. *Hardware for computer labs in State Judicial Academies:* For sustainability of the efforts of ICT Training for Judicial Officers and Court Officials, there is a need of providing a full-fledged Computer Lab to State Judicial Academies (SJA). Phase II of the Project will provide the resources for providing ICT Infrastructure for setting up of a Computer Lab for every SJA.

6. **Information kiosks at each court complex:** The Policy Document proposes installation of touch-screen kiosks and printer at all Court Complexes. These kiosks will provide services such as case status and daily order sheets to litigants without having to approach court officials.

7. **Development of Central Filing Centres** with sufficient infrastructure: It has been proposed that Judicial Service Centres (JSC), which were envisaged primarily as filing counters in Phase I, will be utilised for a composite set of services, including positioning of kiosks, waiting area for litigants, and Central Filing Centres (CFC) and will be called JSC-cum-CFC.

8. **Court libraries computerization:** The libraries of the courts will be computerised. An Integrated Library Management System (ILMS) has been successfully implemented in the Supreme Court. The Policy Document proposes to equip all High Courts and District Courts with ILMS and a Digital Library.

9. **Video-conferencing of all court rooms with prisons:** The phase I will cover 500 locations under Video Conferencing. Phase II will cover the balance courts and corresponding prisons, and will not only be used for remand of under trial prisoners but also to record evidence during such VC sessions where required by the presiding officer of the court.

10. **Solar energy for power backup:** The UPS and DG sets for servers and judicial service centres have been installed in Phase I of the project, but there is no provision of power back-up for thin clients, printers and other hardware. In this regard, the Policy Document proposes to utilise solar energy, as an alternate source, being environment friendly and easily available. It is proposed to initially cover 5% of the total court complexes.

11. **Service Delivery through use of cloud computing:** Service delivery is proposed to be made through cloud computing, thus dispensing with the need for servers in individual court complexes and improving efficiency and scalability of the automation of courts. This will also reduce the need to deploy technical manpower at individual court complexes.

12. **Revamping, upgradation and customization of CIS software** based on results of Process Re-engineering underway in High Courts. This includes optimum automation of case workflow and other improvements such as e-filing, automation of process service, computerised double entry system of book-keeping, administrative process automation including e-office facility and e-procurement.

13. **Systems for timely and regular updation of data** by laying down protocols for updation and improving connectivity to expedite data updation to NJDG by all courts.

Additional requirements for regular updation will be e-mails and digital signatures for court staff.

14. ***Discontinuation of manual registers:*** The Policy Document proposes to promote use of ICT for day-to-day activities by discontinuation of manual registers and Court Registers to be maintained only in e form.

15. ***Facilitating court and case management through MIS:*** Under phase-I of the project, a National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) has been setup which is intended to be the national data warehouse for case data including orders/ judgements for Courts across the country. Phase-II of the project will aim at attaining the full coverage of case data of courts across the country with gradual shift to auto pull mechanism for state court cloud installations which will ensure smooth updation of data on NJDG. Also, data intensive tools and technologies such as 'Data Warehousing technique' which helps in more efficient centralization and aggregation of data from multiple sources into one common repository; Data mining technology for finding patterns which can provided meaningful and insightful trend analysis for the policy makers and help in fraud detection; Online Analytical Processing (OLAP) tool for summation of multiple databases into summarised report; and Business Intelligence (BI) Tools for effective Management Information System (MIS). The data available at NJDG will be used to generate different types of MIS reports so as to facilitate the judiciary in court and case management functions.

16. ***Mobile based service delivery through SMS and Mobile Apps:*** The Policy Document envisages preparation of mobile phone applications on various mobile platforms for latest case related information, and an SMS Gateway based infrastructure to facilitate push and pull based SMS for litigants and lawyers.

17. ***Scanning and digitization of case records:*** Case records, after weeding, will be scanned and digitised in Phase II of the project. These will be ported to a Document Management System for later retrieval, and will promote secure and systematic preservation of records. The cost of digitisation of all case records in courts is proposed to be covered in Phase II of the project.

18. ***Court record room management automation:*** The digitised documents/case records pertaining to a particular court will be automatically generated in the court at the time of hearing,

19. ***Judicial Knowledge Management System :*** The Judicial Knowledge Management System (JKMS) will comprise comprehensive suite of solutions and facilities such as Integrated Library Management Software for optimum use of resources available in various court libraries and as Digital Library accessible to beneficiaries online for easy access of Legal Research Documents,

Committee/Commission Reports, Law Articles, Circulars, Orders, High Court Rules etc. It will also act as repository of all the Supreme Court and High Court judgements and also keep track of new judgements affecting the earlier judgements.

20. **Capacity building:** Capacity building exercise to facilitate the human resources of the judicial system in efficient use of ICT infrastructure is required to be carried out on regular interval. In phase-I of the project, 14000 Judicial Officers and 4000 court staffs were trained and under Phase-II the same exercise will be continued for remaining officers and staffs. Also, refresher courses will be carried out every six months and the labs will be equipped for the facilities catering to 30 trainees at a time.

21. **Process Automation:** The study of processes for potential to automate further will be continued in Phase II of the project also, for which the Judicial Process Re-engineering exercise will be taken up to explore further automation of processes with latest trends in technology. A few of the initiatives proposed to be taken up in Phase II will include (a) Automation of Process Serving to effectively address the issue of delays due to non-service or late service of Court Process, (b) Court Registers in only eForm (No Manual Registers) to ensure use of Computer for all day-to-day Court processes, (c) eFiling through e-filing Portal for High Courts and the District Judiciary to facilitate online e-filing of cases, (d) Judicial Financial Accounts Book Keeping Practice through Computerized Financial Accounting System, and (e) Administrative Process Automation such as file movement and tracking, leave management, personnel information management system etc.

Based on the Policy Document prepared by the eCommittee of Supreme Court in consultation with all the High Courts in the country and approved by Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India, Department of Justice is in the process of formulating eCourts Phase -II project. The following are the targets proposed to be achieved with a project timeline of three years during eCourt Phase II:

- i. Computerisation of around 8000 new courts
- ii. Enhanced ICT enablement of existing 14,249 computerised courts with additional hardware.
- iii. Connecting all courts in the country to the NJDG through WAN and additional redundant connectivity, equipped for eventual integration with the proposed interoperable criminal justice system (ICJS).
- iv. Citizen centric facilities such as Centralised Filing Centres and touch screen based Kiosks in each Court Complex.
- v. Provision of laptops, printers, UPS and connectivity to Judicial Officers not covered under Phase I and replacement of obsolete hardware provided to Judicial Officers under Phase I.
- vi. Installation of Video Conferencing facility at 2500 remaining Court Complexes and 800 remaining jails.

- vii. Computerisation of SJAs, DLSAs and TLSCs not covered under Phase I.
- viii. Creating a robust Court Management System through digitisation, document management, Judicial Knowledge Management and learning tools management.
- ix. Installation of Cloud network and solar energy source at Court Complexes.
- x. Facilitating improved performance of courts through change management and process re-engineering as well as improvement in process servicing through hand-held devices.
- xi. Enhanced ICT enablement through e-filing, e-Payment and use of mobile applications.
- xii. Citizen centric service delivery.

A consolidation of all the initiatives and measures proposed to be taken up and installation of the components planned in Phase-II of the project will result in multi-platform services for the litigants under the Charter of Services. These services include, *inter alia*, case registration, cause lists, daily case status, and final order/judgment uploading which have been provided in Phase I. Further, e-filing of cases, e-payment of court fees, process service through email and through process servers having hand held devices, receipt of digitally signed copies of judgments are some of the services to be added in Phase II. The Charter of Services will serve as a guiding baseline to make Phase-II of the Project as litigant service centric as possible. Lawyers will get daily cause list through SMS, email and on the website. One of the primary advantages of computerization of courts will be the '*automation of workflow management*'. This would enable the courts to exercise greater control over the management of cases in the docket. The services envisaged under the project will thus cater to all stakeholders including the judiciary, litigants and lawyers. ICT enablement will make the functioning of courts efficient and transparent, which will have an overall positive impact on the justice delivery system. It is envisaged that as the project progresses and technology develops, necessary additions will be made to the Charter of Services.