e-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project

For Prelims: Supreme Court, e-Filing, e-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project, National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)

For Mains: Digitisation of Indian Judiciary: Challenges associated, Solutions

Why in News?

The Government of India has **launched the** e-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project in the country for computerization of District and subordinate courts **with the objective of improving access to justice using technology.**

What is e-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project?

- **About & Implementation:**
  - As part of the **National e-Governance** Plan, the **project is under implementation since 2007 for** Information and Communications Technology (ICT) **development** of the Indian Judiciary
  - e-Courts project is being **implemented in association with e-Committee** Supreme Court of India **and the Department of Justice.**
- **Phases:**
  - **Phase I:** It was implemented during 2011-2015.
  - **Phase II:** It was started in 2015 under which various District & Subordinate courts have been computerised.

What are the Initiatives Taken Under the Project?

- **Improvisation of Network:** Under the **Wide Area Network (WAN) Project,** connectivity has been provided to 99.4% of total Court Complexes across India with an improved **bandwidth** speed.
- **Open-Source Software:** Case Information Software (CIS) is based on **Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS)** which has been **developed by** National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- **NJDG Database:** National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) is a database of orders, judgments, and cases, created as an online platform under the eCourts Project.
  - It provides information relating to judicial proceedings/decisions of all computerized district and subordinate courts.
- **Access to Case Status Information:** Open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) have been introduced in 2020 to allow Central and State Governments and institutional litigants including local bodies to access NJDG data to **improve pendency monitoring and compliance.**
  - **7 platforms have been created to provide real-time information** on case status, cause lists, judgements, etc. to lawyers/Litigants.
  - In addition, **Electronic Case Management Tools (ECMT)** have been created with Mobile Apps for lawyers and judges.
- **Virtual Courts:** 21 **Virtual Courts** in 17 States/UTs have been operationalized to handle traffic

challan cases.
  - More than 2.40 crore cases have been handled by 21 virtual courts.
- **Video-Conferencing (VC):** Video-conferencing (VC) facilities have also been enabled between court complexes and corresponding jails.
  - The Supreme Court emerged as a **global leader by conducting lakhs of hearings.**
- **E-filing:** New e-filing system has been rolled out for the electronic filing of legal papers with upgraded features. As of 2022, **a total of 19 High Courts have adopted the model rules of e-Filing.**
- **Regarding Summons: National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP)** has been launched for technology enabled process serving and issuing of summons.
  - It has currently been implemented in 28 States/ UTs.
- **User-friendly Portal:** A new **"Judgment Search" portal** has been started with several user-friendly features. This facility is being provided free of cost to everyone.
- **Creating Awareness:** Towards creating widespread awareness and familiarization of eFiling and eCourts services, manuals and brochures have been **made available in English, Hindi and 11** regional languages for the use of lawyers.

What's New about Phase III?

- **Phase III of the e-Courts Project:**
  - Draft Vision Document for **e-Courts Project Phase III** has been finalized and approved by eCommittee, Supreme Court of India.
  - It **mentions a judicial system that is** more affordable, accessible, cost-effective, predictable, reliable, and transparent for every individual who seeks justice or is part of the delivery of justice in India.
- **Phase III Mentions Various New Features:**
  - Digital and Paperless Courts aimed at bringing court proceedings under a digital format in a court;
  - Online Court focussing on eliminating the presence of litigants or lawyers in the court;
  - Expansion of the scope of Virtual Courts beyond adjudication of Traffic Violations;
  - Use of emerging technologies like **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and its subsets like **Optical Character Recognition (OCR)** etc for analysis of case pendency, forecasting future litigation, etc.

What are the Related Concerns and Solutions?

Concerns	Solutions

Technical Challenges:
  - Complex process that involves upgrading existing technology and infrastructure, which can lead to technical challenges.
	Technical Upgrades:
	  - Regular upgrades and maintenance of technology infrastructure can help minimize technical challenges.

Cybersecurity Risks:
  - With an increasing amount of sensitive and confidential information being stored digitally, courts face the risk of **cyber-attacks** and data breaches.
	Cybersecurity Measures:
	  - Implementing robust cybersecurity measures, such as encryption, secure data storage, and multi-factor authentication.

Equity Concerns:
  - The digitization of courts can
	Accessibility and Equity:
	  - Making digital court systems accessible

exacerbate existing disparities in access to justice for marginalized communities, particularly those without access to technology or who have limited digital literacy skills.	and user-friendly for marginalized communities can help to ensure that everyone has access to justice.
▪ **Preservation of Records:** ○ Digitizing records poses challenges for preserving historical records and ensuring long-term access to court records.	▪ **Record Preservation Plan:** ○ Developing and implementing a comprehensive record preservation plan can help ensure the long-term accessibility and preservation of court records.

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