Virtual Courts

Why in News

Recently, **Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana** has expressed his dissatisfaction towards the newly put open court software in the **Supreme Court** for **virtual hearings**.

- The dissatisfaction emanates from the problem of disconnections, resonance of voices during virtual hearings.

Key Points

- **About:**

    - **Virtual Courts or e-Courts** is a concept aimed at **eliminating the presence of litigants or lawyers in the court** and **adjudication of the case online.**

        - It requires an Online environment and an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enabled infrastructure.
    - In the wake of the **Coronavirus Pandemic in 2020,** the Supreme Court (SC) exercising its **plenary power under** Article 142 passed directions for all courts across the country to **extensively use video-conferencing for judicial proceedings.**
    - Earlier, an **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** based portal **'SUPACE'** was launched by the CJI in the judicial system aimed at assisting judges with legal research.
    - Also, the SC has released the **Draft Model Rules for Live-Streaming and Recording of Court Proceedings.**

e-Courts Project

- It was conceptualized on the basis of the "National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Indian Judiciary-2005" submitted by e-Committee, Supreme Court of India with a vision to transform the Indian Judiciary by ICT enablement of Courts.
- The e-Courts Mission Mode Project, is a pan-India Project, monitored and funded by the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, for the District Courts across the country.

- **Advantages:**

    - **Affordable Justice:** The expansion of e-Courts will ensure easy access to justice at affordable courts to all sections of society.
    - **Faster Delivery of Justice:** The proliferation of e-Courts will make litigation faster, given that required logistics are provided.
    - **Transparency:** e-Courts can overcome the challenges and make the service delivery mechanism transparent and cost-efficient.

        - Litigants can view the status of their case online through various channels created

for service delivery.

- ○ **Integration of Judiciary:** Data sharing between different courts and various departments will also be made easy as everything would be available online under the integrated system.

    - This would be beneficial for both improving the court processes and rendering citizen-centric services.

- ■ **Challenges:**

    - ○ **Operational Difficulties:** Virtual Courts witness technical interruptions during hearings owing to poor connectivity, echoes and other disruptions.

        - Other issues might involve the litigant's lack of confidence in the process due to lack of proximity.
    - ○ **Hacking and Cybersecurity:** On the top of technology, **cybersecurity** will be a huge concern too.
    - ○ **Infrastructure:** Challenges can erupt due to insufficient infrastructure and non-availability of electricity and internet connectivity in most of the Talukas/villages.
    - ○ **Maintaining e-Courts record:** The paralegal staff is not well equipped and trained to effectively handle document or record evidence, and make them readily accessible to the litigant, to the council as well as to the court.

Way Forward

- ■ There is a need to address data privacy and data security concerns while developing a new platform for India's judicial system.
- ■ Infrastructure needs to be updated with sufficient machinery and data connectivity to provide virtual proceeding.
- ■ A user-friendly e-courts mechanism can be developed, which is simple and easily accessible by the common public, which will encourage litigants to use such facilities in the India.
- ■ Creating awareness around e-courts through talks and seminars can help bring to light the facilities and the ease that e-courts can facilitate.

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