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NATIONAL JUDICIAL ACADEMY



**Workshop for Chief Justices of High Court on ICT Enablement of Indian Judiciary
through ECourts Project & Way Forward**

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Objective of the Programme

Under the initiative taken by the committee the National Judicial Academy, Bhopal organized one day online “WORKSHOP FOR CHIEF JUSTICES OF HIGH COURT ON ICT ENABLEMENT OF INDIAN JUDICIARY THROUGH ECOURTS PROJECT & WAY FORWARD”. The workshop was designed and conveyed by the member (HR) E-Committee, Supreme Court of India. The sessions included ICT growth of Indian Judiciary under e-Courts & Its way forward and Role & Impact of High Court Computer Committees in eCourts Project & E-Courts-Technical Infrastructure through NIC. The objective of the program was to appraise the Hon’ble Chief Justices of the High Courts of the initiatives taken by the eCommittee of the Supreme Court of India on eCourts and the implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in the justice delivery system. The workshop aimed to emphasize on delivery of efficient, time-bound, and citizen-centric services through the medium of technology.

The discussion in the workshop examined the contribution of ICT in the growth and modernization of the Indian Judiciary under eCourts, and the concerns & bottlenecks were addressed to ensure effective access to justice. The workshop sought to assess the role & impact of High Court Computer Committees in the eCourts Project. The sessions scrutinized the eCourts technical infrastructure and identify infrastructural requirements for effective ICT enablement. The workshop facilitated discussion on best practices to enhance judicial productivity, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost-effective, predictable, reliable, and transparent which is in alignment with the eCourts project.

Session-wise Programme Schedule

Session 1 – ICT growth of Indian Judiciary under e-Courts & Its way forward

Session 2 - Role & Impact of High Court Computer Committees in eCourts Project & E-Courts-Technical Infrastructure through NIC

Session 1 – ICT growth of Indian Judiciary under e-Courts & Its way forward

Speaker - Hon'ble Dr. Justice Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud

Co-Speaker - Mr. Ashish J. Shirodhonker

The Director, National Judicial Academy welcomed Hon'ble Dr. Justice Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud, Judge, Supreme Court of India, and set the tone for the session by stressing that the world had moved from the age of typewriters to a new age of technology and travel has become a compulsion to keep pace with the world globally. Data and information are seamlessly available, how and to what extent this technology can be harnessed to the best of benefits is the greatest challenge that needs attention.

His Lordship clarified that the purpose of the workshop specifically designed for chief justices is because of the immense potential and importance of ICT to the Indian Judiciary. There is a great digital divide in India. The purpose of the eCourts project is not just to foster the adoption of technology but it's a committee on technology that have a socially purposive object in mind.

Dr Justice. Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud pointed out that the Pandemic hit people in many ways, all other emergency services were shut down including courts. Lawyers, litigants, court staff, and judges have been profoundly affected by COVID-19. The Indian judiciary had adapted to the evolving situation at a rapid pace. In a few months, Supreme Court and High Courts were reopened with one major change i.e. all the proceedings were conducted in virtual modes. The situation was new and unprecedented and the judiciary had faced many challenges like the choice of platform for virtual courts and how access to it can be controlled. These decisions were directly affecting the justice delivery mechanism. The idea of eCourts projects is to develop at the district level and further, it may go up to the highest court.

It was mentioned that the eCommittee of the Supreme Court had come far since it was first constituted by Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti in 2005 to prepare a National Policy and action plan on the computerization of the Indian Judiciary and advise technological, communication, and management related changes across all courts in India. In August 2005 the eCommittee has

come up with its first action plan which divided the work into three phases, the first one being, the initiation of ICT implementation in the Judicial System followed by the second phase in January 2014 as the Coordination of ICT Infrastructure for Judicial System. The eCommittee appointed experts who work with Judges and came out with the vision plan for the phase three document. This vision plan had been circulated to all the High Courts and is still receiving suggestions on the same as pointed out by the speaker. The criticism that is involved with eCourts projects was discussed. It was opined that the pandemic accelerated the push towards going digital and in doing so the efforts of the eCommittee for the last 16 years cannot go unnoticed. The shift toward going digital involves great challenges and there are glaring gaps in our ICT implementation both at the micro and macro level. The primary barrier is not the digital divide but it is the mental divide as discussed during the discourse. It was highlighted that this transition is difficult *per se* for anyone but the right push, some help, and a little perseverance is required to make it a regular habit.

The pitfalls and the plights of many persons with visual disabilities were discussed. Many advocates filed scanned copies of their printed documents which are difficult for a person with a visual disability to read. It was decided to make the websites of the various courts disabled friendly and accessible to everyone in a true sense. It was highlighted that NJDG is a revolutionary step and a request was made to all the participant justices to make use of it as a court management tool in fostering the efficient management of the High Courts and District Judiciary. Introduction of virtual Traffic Challans, Paperless courts, video conferencing facilities between courts and Jails, setting up of Eseva Kendra, WIFI, ensuring Epayment, and communication by registry through SMS and emails are some of the e-initiatives of High Courts to supplement ICT in Indian Judiciary were highlighted.

The second part of the session was presented by Mr. Ashish J. Shiradhonker, HOD, eCourts Project wherein he presented the eCourts Initiatives like Case Information System (CIS), National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), and Virtual Courts. He highlighted that the CIS is completely built on free and open-source technology (FOSS Technology). Around 3267 court complexes across the country and in bilingual languages were computerized. Various types of services were provided through service delivery channels like Web Portals, Mobile App, SMS, Automated Emails, and Touch Screen Kiosks. NJDG website helps in monitoring the pendency and disposal of the cases on various parameters like case type, age of the case and disposal nature was deliberated upon. Another service delivery channel is the mobile app which is a common app for District Courts and High Courts. The speaker highlighted the various feature

of the mobile app like the facility to search and track cases using QR Codes, the calendar feature to view occupancy at a glance, and through import/export facility backup of the portfolio, cases can be saved on a local storage drive. Online payment of court fees, fines, penalties, and judicial deposits has been initiated online through the epayment portal. National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP) is the other feature for speedy transmission of processes and service status within the state and outside the state were discussed during the session. The last part of the presentation was on Virtual courts through which the physical appearance of the offender/violator in the court is eliminated. Further, the number of judges performing judicial work in adjudicating traffic challans across the state can be reduced virtually to a single judge. ECourts system has integrated with another system like UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) and CSCs (Common Service Centres) for smooth functioning. Lastly, the speaker pointed out the facilities that are available to judicial officers like JustIS Mobile App which helps them to monitor pendency and disposal at their fingertips and the facility to tag important cases and mark short notes for a case is available.

Session 2 - Role & Impact of High Court Computer Committees in eCourts Project & E-Courts-Technical Infrastructure through NIC

Speakers - Hon'ble Justice Rajiv Shakdher, Justice Nitin Jamdar & Hon'ble Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque

The Speakers for the second session of the day were Hon'ble Justice Rajiv Shakdher, Judge Delhi High Court, Hon'ble Justice Nitin Jamdar, Judge Bombay High Court, and Hon'ble Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque, Judge Kerala High Court. Hon'ble Justice Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud began by introducing the themes for the session like Role & Impact of the IT Committee in Creating & Progressing e-Eco System in Delhi High Court & Delhi District Courts, Usage of CIS & NJDG for Court Administration and Institutional Structural reforms – Plans & Objectives.

The session commenced by broadly highlighting about the Role and Impact of the IT Committee across the several High Court of the Country. The progress of ECommittee in Delhi in Phase 1 and phase 2 were discussed in detail. The speaker highlighted phase 3 by providing details about the software services like Interoperable Criminal Justice System (I.C.J.S), which enables Data sharing amongst various stakeholders i.e. court, police, prosecution, prison, etc. e-filing, mobile App, SMS Facility E-cause list, online order & judgments were the software services provided for Judges, Advocates, and litigants. Additional services in Phase 3 were also

launched like Virtual Court for Traffic cases, Digital Courts of Negotiable Instrument Act, Telepresence Facility, and virtual & Hybrid Hearings. YouTube Channel of Delhi High Court, e-Lok Adalat Online Legal Service Application Form, and facility to apply for Pre-institution Mediation in Commercial Cases were also deliberated upon. Furthermore, the speaker discussed his vision for the immediate future by providing Online Certified Copies, paperless Service of court process, doing away with physical copies of judgments and orders, and live streaming of court process.

It was discussed in detail about the CIS and NJDG software. The CIS NC 3.0 is the presently used version that is based on Free and Open Source Technology. The main features include unique case number records, e-filing, and e-pay, templates for orders and Judgments, Automated SMS and Emails, etc. Judges, registries, Advocates, litigants, and Government Agencies are the users of NJDG as discussed by the speaker. Admin Login feature in NJDG was highlighted by the speaker which is a unique feature and it is not accessible by the public in general. Digital inspection of a court can be done in seconds through NJDG. Judicial Time Spent, Pendency Report, Judge Wise case disposal, and query builder are some of the features under Admin Login. He further discussed the features of open access NJDG like case type-wise/stage-wise pendency list, age-wise pendency chart, and the graphical representation of Institution v. Disposal of cases were also available. Case Alert tabs and Lok Adalat Report can also be accessed through NJDG. Mediation, Legal Aid, Internal Inspection Reports, etc. were the further uses of CIS as mentioned by the speaker.

On the theme of Institutional Structural Reforms – Plans & Objectives. The speaker discussed the evolution of digital space in the Judiciary. Building IT infrastructure, overseeing the implementation of the projects, introduction of CIS, citizen-centric approach were the steps taken under Phases 1 and 2 respectively as discussed during the discourse. The speaker mentioned the shift to an e-ecosystem as the goal for phase 3. Talking about the plans and objectives of the IT Directorate, the speaker stressed making a role shift from implementing agency to transformative agency and conducting an independent study for total automation. The approach should be to bring about structural changes through interactive mode. An IAS Officer was appointed as Nodal officer for the e-court in the State of Kerala who is taking a proactive role in extending the Government IT released projects and services to the High Court. IT Directorate focuses on three areas i.e. Judicial Function, Judicial Administration, and Administration. If process re-engineering for complete automation can be made, then

fundamentals changes in the Judiciary can also be brought. The speaker discussed the importance of the role of an independent entity for research & development, maintenance, and training, security audit, etc. under the short term goals keeping in mind the user perspective all in one platform (Judicial and Administrative functions) a dashboard for Chief Justices, Judges, advocates, employees are to be created. The speaker also discussed the focus on inclusive access to justice like a hybrid model for court hearings, connecting mainstream Judiciary through Technology and Access from remote locations. Process re-engineering through complete automation, bringing reforms in the rules, and also re-deploying surplus manpower for creating more courts in the district Judiciary were the long-term goals as discussed in the session.

The session concluded to have an ICT-enabled and accessible judiciary, as well as establishing an IT cadre with technical advisors in each High Court. Finally, current developments in courts initiatives were emphasized by significant committees on Live Streaming Rules, Video Conferencing Rules, e-filing Rules, Electronic Registers, and Data Security & Privacy.