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?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Challenges:</td>
<td>Technical Upgrades:</td>
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<td>- Complex process that involves upgrading existing technology and infrastructure, which can lead to technical challenges.</td>
<td>- Regular upgrades and maintenance of technology infrastructure can help minimize technical challenges.</td>
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<td>Cybersecurity Risks:</td>
<td>Cybersecurity Measures:</td>
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<td>- With an increasing amount of sensitive and confidential information being stored digitally, courts face the risk of cyber-attacks and data breaches.</td>
<td>- Implementing robust cybersecurity measures, such as encryption, secure data storage, and multi-factor authentication.</td>
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<td>Equity Concerns:</td>
<td>Accessibility and Equity:</td>
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<td>- The digitization of courts can</td>
<td>- Making digital court systems accessible</td>
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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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**UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

Q. With reference to the Indian judiciary, consider the following statements: (2021)

1. Any retired judge of the Supreme Court of India can be called back to sit and act as a Supreme Court judge by the Chief Justice of India with the prior permission of the President of India.
2. A High Court in India has the power to review its own judgement as the Supreme Court does.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither I nor 2

Ans: (c)

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