e-Courts Phase III Accelerates India’s Transition Towards Digital, Paperless and Citizen-Centric Justice Delivery

Published On: 12-08-2026

Recent Developments:

- **e-Courts Phase III (2023–2027)** continues to transform India's judicial system through **digitisation, e-filing, virtual hearings, interoperable platforms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), analytics and Optical Character Recognition (OCR)**; the Union Cabinet approved Phase III on **13 September 2023** with a financial outlay of **?7,210 crore**.
- As of **July 2026**, more than **1.21 crore cases** had been filed electronically, while e-payments had processed approximately **?1,594 crore in court fees and ?97 crore in fines**.
- **CIS 4.0** has been implemented across all courts, integrating judicial information with the **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), e-Filing, Virtual Courts and Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)**.
- More than **734 crore pages of court records**, including legacy records, had been digitised, while courts had conducted more than **4.15 crore video-conferencing hearings**.
- **2,515 e-Sewa Kendras** were functional across High Courts and District Courts as of the July 2026 progress update; a separate official update reported **2,584 functional e-Sewa Kendras across 25 High Courts as of 30 June 2026**, reflecting continuing expansion.
- The **Union Budget 2026** allocated **?1,200 crore** to e-Courts Phase III, in addition to **?810 crore** for judicial infrastructure under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for District and Subordinate Courts.

Understanding the e-Courts Mission Mode Project:

Meaning and Institutional Framework:

- The **e-Courts Mission Mode Project** is a technology-driven judicial reform initiative aimed at strengthening **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** in India's judiciary and improving the accessibility, efficiency, transparency and affordability of justice.
- The project has been implemented since **2007** under the **National e-Governance Plan**, with the **Department of Justice** coordinating with the **e-Committee of the Supreme Court** and implementing the project through the respective High Courts.
- The project follows a **decentralised implementation model**, because High Courts play the central role in deploying digital judicial infrastructure across their respective jurisdictions.

Core Objectives:

- **Digitisation:** Convert paper-based judicial records and processes into secure digital formats.
- **Access to justice:** Enable citizens, lawyers, judges, witnesses and other stakeholders to access judicial services remotely.
- **Transparency:** Make case information, orders, judgments and pendency data more accessible through platforms such as **NJDG**.

- **Efficiency:** Reduce procedural delays associated with physical filing, manual record management, physical service of summons and unnecessary court visits.
- **Inclusion:** Ensure that citizens with limited digital literacy or inadequate digital infrastructure can access online judicial services through **e-Sewa Kendras**.

Evolution of the e-Courts Project:

Phase I — Basic Computerisation (2011–2015):

- Phase I concentrated on **basic computerisation and internal connectivity**; **14,249 courts** were computerised and **LAN connectivity** was installed in **13,683 courts**.
- The phase established the technological foundation required for subsequent digital judicial services.

Phase II — Citizen-Centric Digital Services (2015–2023):

- Phase II focused on using ICT to facilitate **citizen-oriented judicial services**, including hardware modernisation, WAN connectivity, stakeholder training and establishment of e-Sewa Kendras.
- Major digital platforms such as **Case Information System (CIS), National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), e-Filing and e-Payments** were developed during this phase.

Phase III — Digital, Paperless and Intelligent Courts (2023–2027):

- Phase III has an approved financial outlay of **?7,210 crore** and seeks to transform courts into **digital and paperless institutions** through large-scale digitisation and universalisation of digital services.
- Its major focus areas include **legacy-record digitisation, e-Filing, e-Payments, virtual hearings, paperless courts, interoperability, AI, analytics, OCR, secure digital storage and citizen-centric services**.

Major Digital Components and Their Significance:

National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):

- **NJDG** is a public-facing judicial data platform that enables access to information relating to **cases, orders, judgments and pendency**, thereby improving transparency and facilitating evidence-based judicial administration.
- As of July 2026, NJDG provided access to information concerning more than **32.46 crore cases** and over **39.79 crore orders and judgments**.
- NJDG can support identification of **pendency patterns, case categories, procedural bottlenecks and workload distribution**, making it relevant to judicial planning and performance monitoring.

e-Filing and e-Payments:

- **e-Filing** allows litigants and advocates to submit judicial documents electronically, reducing dependence on physical filing counters, paper records and repeated court visits.
- **e-Payments** enable online payment of court fees and fines, improving convenience, reducing transaction costs and strengthening financial transparency.
- More than **1.21 crore cases** had been filed through the e-Filing platform by July 2026, demonstrating substantial adoption of digital filing.

Video Conferencing and Virtual Courts:

- **Video Conferencing** enables remote participation of judges, lawyers, witnesses, undertrials and other stakeholders, thereby reducing travel requirements and improving access to judicial proceedings.
- More than **4.15 crore video-conferencing hearings** had been conducted by July 2026.

- **Virtual Courts** enable online adjudication of selected categories of cases, particularly traffic challans, thereby reducing the physical burden on conventional courts.
- **31 Virtual Courts** were functional under the July 2026 progress update.

e-Sewa Kendras:

- **e-Sewa Kendras** function as citizen assistance centres within court complexes and bridge the **digital divide** by helping citizens access digital judicial services.
- They assist with **e-Filing, e-Payments, case-status tracking, certified copies, orders and judgments, video-conferencing access and other digital court services**.
- Their importance extends beyond technology because they provide an institutional mechanism for ensuring that digitalisation does not exclude citizens lacking digital literacy or adequate infrastructure.

Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):

- **ICJS** seeks interoperability among different pillars of the criminal justice system, enabling digital exchange of information among institutions such as **police, courts, prosecution, prisons and forensic agencies**.
- Integration of **CCTNS-generated FIRs and chargesheets with CIS 4.0** reduces duplication, improves information flow and strengthens end-to-end digital criminal justice administration.

NSTEP and e-Summons:

- **National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP)** enables technology-assisted tracking and management of judicial processes such as summons and notices, improving traceability and reducing delays in service.
- The **e-Summons system** facilitates electronic delivery of summons through email and represents a shift from conventional paper-based processes towards faster digital communication.

Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies:

- Phase III incorporates **Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, OCR, analytics and other emerging technologies** to improve judicial research, document processing, transcription, translation and case management.
- **LegRAA (Legal Research Analysis Assistant)** has been developed to assist judges with **legal research and document analysis**.
- The Government has earmarked **?53.57 crore** within the Phase III technological advancement component for AI, Machine Learning and related emerging technologies in High Courts up to 2027.
- The Supreme Court and **IIT Madras** have collaborated on AI-enabled technologies covering **transcription, translation, summarisation, process automation, legal-domain language models and capacity building**.

Digital Preservation and Paperless Courts:

- Phase III treats **digitisation of legacy judicial records** as a central requirement because historical paper records create problems of storage, retrieval, preservation and physical accessibility.
- The Department of Justice has reported that Phase III envisages digitisation of approximately **3,100 crore documents**, while a substantial budgetary allocation has been made specifically for digitisation and preservation of court records.
- The **Judicial Digital Trustworthy Repository** is being developed to facilitate secure and permanent digital preservation of judicial records.

<u>Constitutional and Governance Significance:</u>

Access to Justice:

- Judicial digitalisation strengthens the constitutional objective of **access to justice**, particularly by reducing geographical, financial and procedural barriers faced by litigants.
- It complements the principle underlying **Article 39A**, which directs the State to promote equal justice and provide free legal aid so that opportunities for securing justice are not denied because of economic or other disabilities.

Transparency and Accountability:

- Platforms such as **NJDG** increase the public availability of judicial information and enable data-driven assessment of pendency and disposal patterns.
- Greater transparency can strengthen institutional accountability while preserving the necessary safeguards for **privacy, confidentiality and judicial independence**.

Cooperative Institutional Architecture:

- e-Courts demonstrates **institutional cooperation between the executive and judiciary**, with the Department of Justice coordinating implementation and the Supreme Court's e-Committee providing technological and judicial guidance.
- The decentralised model through High Courts recognises India's **federal and multi-level judicial structure**.

Major Benefits:

- **Reduced transaction costs:** Digital filing, payments and remote hearings reduce travel, paperwork and repeated physical visits.
- **Improved transparency:** NJDG provides accessible information regarding cases, orders, judgments and pendency.
- **Faster information exchange:** CIS, ICJS and other interoperable platforms facilitate digital movement of judicial information.
- **Better record management:** Digitisation reduces dependence on physical storage and improves retrieval and preservation.
- **Greater inclusion:** e-Sewa Kendras help bridge the digital divide and enable citizens with limited technological capacity to use digital judicial services.
- **Administrative efficiency:** Digital dashboards, analytics and case-management tools can assist judges and court administrators in monitoring judicial workloads.

Key Challenges:

Digital Divide and Accessibility:

- Digital justice can unintentionally exclude citizens who lack **internet connectivity, smartphones, digital literacy or financial resources**, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas.
- Expansion of **e-Sewa Kendras, assisted digital services and multilingual interfaces** is therefore essential for inclusive digital justice.

Cybersecurity and Data Privacy:

- Digitised judicial records contain highly sensitive personal, financial and legal information, creating risks related to **cyberattacks, unauthorised access, data breaches and identity theft**.
- Strong encryption, authentication, access controls, audit trails, cybersecurity standards and privacy safeguards are necessary for trustworthy digital courts.

Technological Reliability:

- Dependence on digital infrastructure creates vulnerabilities arising from **network failures, power interruptions, software incompatibility and inadequate technical support**.
- Resilient connectivity, cloud infrastructure, disaster recovery systems and continuous maintenance are therefore essential.

AI and Judicial Independence:

- AI can assist judges but should not replace **human judicial reasoning, constitutional interpretation or judicial accountability**.
- Algorithmic systems require safeguards against **bias, opacity, inaccurate outputs, automation bias and inadequate explainability**.

Digital Evidence and Procedural Fairness:

- Greater digitisation increases the importance of reliable **digital evidence, authentication, chain of custody and cybersecurity**.
- Remote hearings should not compromise the accused's right to a fair hearing, effective legal representation or meaningful participation in judicial proceedings.

Way Forward:

Build Inclusive Digital Justice:

- Expand **e-Sewa Kendras**, assisted digital services, multilingual platforms and digital-literacy programmes to ensure that technological modernisation does not become a new barrier to justice.

Strengthen Cybersecurity:

- Establish robust **privacy-by-design, encryption, authentication, cybersecurity audits, data governance and disaster-recovery mechanisms** across judicial platforms.

Adopt Responsible AI:

- AI deployment should follow principles of **human oversight, transparency, explainability, accuracy, accountability and constitutional rights protection**.
- AI should primarily function as an **assistive technology**, leaving final judicial decisions to constitutionally authorised human institutions.

Integrate Digitalisation with Judicial Reform:

- Technology alone cannot eliminate pendency because delays also arise from **judicial vacancies, inadequate infrastructure, procedural complexity, investigation delays, shortage of prosecutors and excessive litigation**.
- e-Courts should therefore be integrated with **ADR, mediation, Lok Adalats, case-management reforms, judicial capacity building and process simplification**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **Constitutional linkage:** Article **39A** provides the normative foundation for equal access to justice and free legal aid.
- **Governance linkage:** e-Courts represents **Digital India applied to the justice sector**, shifting governance from physical-service delivery towards digital, data-enabled and citizen-centric administration.

- **SDG linkage:** The initiative contributes to **SDG 16 — Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**, particularly the objective of promoting access to justice and effective, accountable institutions.