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India Targets Nationwide Digital Criminal Justice System Rollout by July 2027 Through the Interoperable Criminal Justice System

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Recent Developments:

- The **Union Government** has announced its objective of achieving a **fully digital Criminal Justice System (CJS)** across the country by **1 July 2027** through the **Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)**.
- The initiative aims to establish seamless digital integration among **Police, Courts, Prisons, Forensic Laboratories, and Prosecution**, thereby creating a unified, transparent, efficient, and technology-driven criminal justice ecosystem.
- The programme supports the broader vision of **Digital India, e-Governance, Ease of Justice**, and the implementation of India's new criminal laws by enabling paperless and interoperable criminal proceedings.

Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):

About:

- The **Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)** is a national e-Governance platform designed to digitally integrate all major pillars of the **Criminal Justice System** through secure exchange of information and real-time interoperability.
- The platform integrates the **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), e-Courts, e-Prisons, e-Forensics, and e-Prosecution** into a common digital ecosystem.
- **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** functions as the **Nodal Agency**, while the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** serves as the technology partner for implementation.
- The project has been implemented under the **Modernisation of Police Forces** programme to improve efficiency, coordination, and evidence-based criminal justice delivery.

Objectives:

- Establish seamless digital information exchange among all criminal justice institutions.
- Improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency in criminal investigations and trials.
- Minimise duplication of records and manual paperwork.
- Enable faster investigation, prosecution, and judicial decision-making.
- Facilitate evidence-based policing and data-driven criminal justice administration.

Criminal Justice System (CJS):

About:

- The **Criminal Justice System** comprises **Police, Judiciary, Prisons, Forensic Science Institutions, and Prosecution Agencies**, which collectively ensure investigation of offences, prosecution of offenders, fair trials, and enforcement of criminal law.

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- The system seeks to protect the rights of victims, uphold the **Rule of Law**, deter criminal activities, and ensure justice through due legal process.

Major Components:

- **Police**, responsible for crime prevention, investigation, law enforcement, and maintenance of public order.
- **Courts**, responsible for adjudication of criminal cases and protection of constitutional and legal rights.
- **Prisons**, responsible for lawful custody, correction, rehabilitation, and reformation of offenders.
- **Forensic Science Laboratories**, responsible for scientific examination of evidence supporting criminal investigations.
- **Prosecution Agencies**, responsible for conducting criminal prosecutions on behalf of the State.

Digital Criminal Justice Ecosystem:

Major Features:

- Digital registration of **First Information Reports (FIRs)**.
- Electronic investigation records and digital collection of evidence.
- Online preparation and filing of digital charge sheets.
- Electronic submission and tracking of forensic reports.
- Digital management of witness statements and testimonies.
- Technology-enabled conduct of criminal trials.
- Digital disposal, preservation, and archival of criminal records.
- Secure inter-departmental exchange of authenticated criminal justice information.

Expected Benefits:

- Reduction in procedural delays and pendency of criminal cases.
- Improved coordination among investigating agencies and judicial institutions.
- Enhanced transparency through digital audit trails.
- Better accessibility of criminal records across authorised institutions.
- Improved quality of criminal investigations through scientific evidence integration.

Major Digital Platforms Supporting ICJS:

Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS):

- Launched in **2009**, **CCTNS** connects police stations across India through a common digital platform.
- It facilitates crime investigation, criminal database management, analytics, intelligence generation, policy formulation, and delivery of citizen-centric police services.
- The platform serves as the digital backbone of police modernisation in India.

e-Prisons:

- **e-Prisons** is a cloud-based prison management application implemented across States and Union Territories.
- It enables real-time information sharing relating to inmates, prison administration, court production, parole, remission, transfers, and prison management.
- The system improves coordination among prisons, courts, and law enforcement agencies.

e-Forensics:

- **e-Forensics** enables online registration, tracking, and management of forensic examination requests.
- The platform facilitates timely, accurate, and scientifically reliable forensic reports for investigating agencies.
- It strengthens scientific investigation and improves evidentiary quality during criminal trials.

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e-Prosecution:

- **e-Prosecution** digitises prosecution workflows, case scrutiny, legal opinions, prosecution monitoring, and court coordination.
- The system enhances transparency, improves case preparation, and facilitates faster criminal trials.

National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS):

- **NAFIS** is a centralised biometric fingerprint database maintained for law enforcement agencies across India.
- It enables rapid fingerprint matching, criminal identification, and interstate sharing of biometric information.
- The system strengthens investigation efficiency through advanced biometric technology.

Criminal Procedure (Identification) System:

- The **Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022** authorises police and prison authorities to collect specified measurements for criminal identification and investigation.
- **NCRB** has been designated as the national implementing agency responsible for establishing and maintaining the system across all States and Union Territories.
- The legislation expands the scope of scientific identification by incorporating modern biometric and forensic techniques.

Significance of ICJS:

Governance Significance:

- Strengthens **Good Governance** through technology-enabled justice delivery.
- Promotes transparency, accountability, and institutional coordination.
- Reduces paperwork and administrative inefficiencies.
- Supports evidence-based policy formulation using criminal justice data.

Judicial Significance:

- Facilitates speedy investigation and time-bound criminal trials.
- Improves case management through integrated digital workflows.
- Strengthens the quality and admissibility of digital evidence.
- Enhances judicial efficiency by enabling seamless access to case records.

Law Enforcement Significance:

- Enables real-time sharing of criminal intelligence across agencies.
- Improves interstate coordination in investigating organised crime, terrorism, cybercrime, and human trafficking.
- Strengthens crime analytics through integrated national databases.

Citizen-Centric Significance:

- Improves accessibility to criminal justice services.
- Enhances transparency in criminal proceedings.
- Reduces procedural inconvenience for victims, witnesses, and litigants.
- Promotes faster delivery of justice through digital processes.

Challenges:

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Data Privacy and Cybersecurity:

- Integration of multiple criminal justice databases increases the risk of cyberattacks, unauthorised access, and data breaches.
- Protection of sensitive personal information requires robust cybersecurity safeguards.

Digital Divide:

- Unequal digital infrastructure and limited digital literacy may reduce accessibility, particularly in rural and remote regions.
- Vulnerable sections may face barriers in accessing technology-enabled justice services.

Fair Trial and Due Process:

- Technical failures, connectivity issues, and excessive dependence on digital platforms may affect effective legal representation.
- Digital systems must supplement rather than undermine procedural fairness.

Institutional Challenges:

- Variations in digital infrastructure across States affect interoperability.
- Capacity constraints and inadequate technical training hinder effective implementation.
- Integration of legacy databases remains a significant administrative challenge.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges:

- India requires a more comprehensive legal framework governing **Artificial Intelligence, digital evidence, algorithmic accountability, and criminal justice data governance**.
- Uniform standards for electronic evidence preservation and admissibility require further strengthening.

Way Forward:

Strengthening Digital Justice Infrastructure:

- Develop secure national criminal justice data architecture supported by encryption, regular cybersecurity audits, and strict access-control mechanisms.
- Upgrade digital infrastructure across all police stations, courts, prisons, forensic laboratories, and prosecution offices.

Capacity Building:

- Provide continuous training for police officers, prosecutors, forensic experts, prison officials, and judicial officers on digital investigation techniques, cyber forensics, and electronic evidence.
- Promote specialised capacity in emerging technologies including **Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain**, and digital forensic science.

Legal and Ethical Framework:

- Establish comprehensive legal standards governing the use of **Artificial Intelligence**, facial recognition, predictive policing, and digital evidence.
- Ensure independent oversight mechanisms to protect privacy, transparency, accountability, and constitutional due process.

- Harmonise criminal justice digitisation with the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, ensuring lawful processing, storage, and protection of personal data.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 14:** Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty through fair, just, and reasonable procedure.
- **Article 39A:** Equal justice and free legal aid.
- **Article 50:** Separation of judiciary from the executive.

Important Institutions:

- **National Crime Records Bureau(NCRB):** National repository for crime statistics, criminal databases, fingerprint systems, and implementation of ICJS-related projects.
- **National Informatics Centre (NIC):** Premier government technology organisation responsible for digital governance infrastructure.
- **Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs):** Scientific institutions providing expert forensic evidence for criminal investigations and judicial proceedings.

UPSC Mains Enrichment:

- **Technology-enabled criminal justice** represents an important pillar of **Digital Governance**, but its success depends upon balancing **efficiency, privacy, cybersecurity, fair trial guarantees**, and **constitutional due process**.
- The **Interoperable Criminal Justice System** exemplifies the convergence of **e-Governance, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Public Infrastructure**, and **Rule of Law**, making it an important topic for **GS Paper II (Governance)**, **GS Paper III (Internal Security and Science & Technology)**, and **Ethics (Use of Technology in Public Administration)**