AILF INSIGHTS · COURTS AND DELAY

e-Courts, e-filing and virtual hearings: India's digital courts explained

A guide to India's e-Courts project, including e-filing, virtual hearings, the National Judicial Data Grid and what Phase III aims to deliver.

Over the past fifteen years India's courts have been through a quiet transformation. A litigant can now check the status of a case on a phone, a lawyer can file from an office, and a hearing can be joined by video. The e-Courts project is the programme behind this.

The three phases

Phase I computerised courts: hardware, connectivity and basic case information software.

Phase II connected them: a common case information system, the National Judicial Data Grid, e-filing portals, e-payment of court fees and services for citizens.

Phase III, approved in 2023 with an outlay of over ₹7,000 crore, aims at digital and paperless courts: digitisation of records, wider e-filing, expanded virtual hearings, and the use of emerging technology for case management.

What is available today

- **Case status and orders** online and through mobile applications.
- **National Judicial Data Grid**, with figures on filing, disposal and pendency for district courts, High Courts and the Supreme Court.
- **e-Filing**, with online payment of court fees.
- **Virtual hearings**, which expanded greatly during the pandemic and continue in hybrid form in many courts.
- **Virtual courts** for traffic and other petty offences, where fines are paid online.
- **Live-streaming** of selected proceedings, including Constitution Bench hearings.
- **e-Sewa Kendras** in court complexes to help those without access or skills.

What it has changed

Travel and waiting time have fallen for many routine hearings. Lawyers outside the metros can appear before distant courts. Data that was once locked in registers is public, which allows delay to be measured and discussed.

What remains to be done

- Practice differs from court to court. A lawyer must learn each system.
- Connectivity and equipment are weak in many taluk courts.
- Digital literacy among litigants, clerks and some lawyers needs support.
- Old records must be scanned before courts can be truly paperless.
- Rules on virtual evidence and electronic service need consistent application.

What firms should do

- Train every lawyer and clerk in e-filing for the courts where the firm practises.
- Keep documents in searchable digital form from the start.
- Equip a proper room for video hearings.
- Use court data to advise clients on realistic timelines.
- Help clients who lack access.

The principle

Technology does not decide cases. Judges do. But technology can remove the hours lost to queues, travel and missing files, so that the time of the court is spent on justice. That is worth every rupee of the investment.

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