

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE
(DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE)

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No. 1274
TO BE ANSWERED ON FRIDAY, THE 09th FEBRUARY, 2024

Virtual Courts

1274. SHRI ARJUN LAL MEENA:

Will the MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is working on any scheme to set up virtual courts/branches for conducting virtual proceedings in the high courts of the country including Rajasthan; and
- (b) if so, the details of such virtual branches likely to be setup?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE
MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE; MINISTER OF STATE IN THE
MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS; AND MINISTER OF
STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE**

(SHRI ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL)

(a) to (b):As part of the National eGovernance Plan, the eCourts Mission Mode project is under implementation since 2007 for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) development of the Indian Judiciary based on the “National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology in the Indian Judiciary”. eCourts project is being implemented under the joint partnership of Department of Justice, Ministry of Law & Justice, Government of India and e-Committee, Supreme Court of India, in a decentralized manner through respective High Courts. The enhancement of

the Video Conferencing (VC) facilities, e-filing etc are important components of the eCourts project.

Establishment of additional benches of High Courts where geographical area of the State is large and terrain is difficult has been a long-standing demand of states. For the establishment of additional Benches of a High Court, there is a prescribed process that involves a long duration of time. The decision to establish Virtual Benches of High Courts is an administrative matter of the concerned High Courts and the Central Government is not directly involved in the matter. However, a letter dated 09.03.2023 was addressed to Chief Justices of all High Courts (including Rajasthan) by then Hon'ble Minister of Law & Justice for taking necessary action for creation of Virtual Benches through the facility of e-filing and Video Conferencing in different districts in the State so as to access the High Courts directly from the district and thus serve the purpose that an Additional Bench of the High Court in that region/district would otherwise provide. A reminder letter dated 11.10.2023 was addressed by Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Law and Justice as well.

Taking a lead in this sphere, the High Court of Orissa (Cuttack) has established 20 Virtual Benches of High Court at District Courts facilitating advocates/party in person to appear through the Virtual High Court Centers and conduct cases before the High Court. Guidelines for the same are available on the website of High Court of Orissa.

eCourt project has provided facility of e-Sewa Kendras in various court complexes to serve as a one stop solution for VC, Virtual Hearing, e-filing and other facilities of eCourt project to bridge the digital divide that exists in the country. e-filing of cases from e-Sewa Kendras at different districts and participation through Virtual Hearings would enable the common citizens to avail the accessibility of legal services of the High Courts. As on 31.12.2023, a

total of 880 e-Sewa Kendras has been established nationwide, underscoring the positive impact of this initiative in providing valuable services to legal practitioners and litigants. Under Phase III of the Project, for bridging the digital divide, provision of saturation of all court complexes comprising 4400 e-Sewa Kendras has been made with a budgetary outlay of Rs. 394.48 crore.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee in its 103rd Report on 'Functioning of Virtual Courts/Court Proceedings through Video Conferencing' has also emphasised the importance and utility of establishment of virtual courts.

In September 2023, the Union Cabinet has accorded approval to the Phase – III of the eCourts project with a budget of Rs. 7,210 crore. As per the Detailed Project Report (DPR) of Phase – III, there is a provision of enhancing and upgrading the available infrastructure of video conferencing, an essential requirement for conducting virtual hearing. Funds of Rs. 228.48 crore has been earmarked for expansion of the VC facilities with a physical target of upgradation of facilities in 10,200 Courts all over India.
