

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE  
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

**RAJYA SABHA**  
STARRED QUESTION NO. \*189  
ANSWERED ON – 12/12/2024

**VULNERABLE WITNESS DEPOSITION CENTRES**

**\*189 Dr. Sikander Kumar:**

Will the Minister of *LAW AND JUSTICE* be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government has received proposal that Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centres (VWDCs) should be established to facilitate better process of recording victim testimonies for smoother court proceeding;
- (b) if so, the time by which such centres are likely to be established;
- (c) the details of funds allocated under Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) scheme in the current year for Himachal Pradesh; and
- (d) whether Government is taking steps to upgrade court rooms with modern technology and to have a child psychologist to assist the child with rigorous pre-trial and trial procedures?

**ANSWER**

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

**(SHRI ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL)**

(a) to (d): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

**STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) to (d) OF THE RAJYA SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. \*189 FOR 12/12/2024 REGARDING 'VULNERABLE WITNESS DEPOSITION CENTRES'**

(a) & (b): As per the Hon'ble Supreme Court's judgment dated 11.01.2022 in *Smruti Tukaram Badade vs State of Maharashtra* (M.A No. 1852 of 2019 in Criminal Appeal No. 1101 of 2019), all High Courts have been directed to adopt and notify a Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centres Scheme and form permanent Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centers (VWDC) Committees to assess district-wise VWDC needs, oversee implementation, and conduct trainings. The High Courts were also asked to estimate costs for setting up at least one VWDC per District or Additional Sessions Court and propose the optimal number of VWDCs for the State. Further, the State Governments were tasked with promptly sanctioning and disbursing funds based on these estimates and appointing a Finance Department nodal officer to assist in implementation.

(c): A Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the establishment of Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs), including exclusive POCSO Courts for expeditious disposal of Rape and POCSO Act cases came to be introduced, following the enactment of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 and the order of Hon'ble Supreme Court [Suo Motu Writ (Criminal) No. 1/2019]. The Scheme has been extended twice, with the latest extension up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, targeting the establishment of 790 courts. As per the inputs received from the High Courts, as on 31.10.2024, 750 FTSCs including 408 exclusive POCSO Courts are functional in 30 States/UTs. These courts have disposed more than 2,87,000 cases as of 31.10.2024.

The Department has released a sum of ₹ 1008.14 Crore to the States/UTs since its inception to ensure the smooth functioning of the courts, which includes ₹ 173.59 Crore released in the current F.Y. 2024-25, against the allocated budget of ₹ 200.00 Crore. A sum of ₹ 9.07 Crore as a Central Share has been released to the State of Himachal Pradesh since the inception of the Scheme, which includes ₹ 2.22 Crore released in the current financial year for the expenditure incurred in the functioning of 6 FTSCs in the State.

(d): The eCourts Mission Mode Project is under implementation for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development of the Indian Judiciary. The Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India in close coordination with the eCommittee of Supreme Court of India is implementing eCourts Project in a decentralized manner through the respective High Courts. Phase I of the project was implemented between 2011-2015. Phase II of the project extended from 2015-2023. The Government has taken the following e-initiatives to make justice accessible and available for all: -

- I. Under the Wide Area Network (WAN) Project, connectivity has been provided to 99.5% of total Court Complexes across India with 10 Mbps to 100 Mbps bandwidth speed.
- II. 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 of the country. Litigants can access case information and more than 27.64 crore orders /judgements(as on 29.11.2024).
- III. Case Information Software (CIS) based on customized Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) has been developed. Currently CIS National Core Version 3.2 is being implemented in District Courts and the CIS National Core Version 1.0 is being implemented for the High Courts.
- IV. As part of eCourts project, 7 platforms have been created to provide real time information on case status, cause lists, judgements etc. to lawyers/Litigants through SMS Push and Pull (Over 4 lakhs SMS sent daily), Email (Over 6 lakhs sent daily), multilingual eCourts services Portal (35 lakh hits daily), JSC (Judicial Service centres) and Info Kiosks. In addition, Electronic Case Management Tools (ECMT) have been created with Mobile App for lawyers (total 2.69 crore downloads till 31.10.2024) and JustIS app for judges (20,719 downloads till 31.10.2024).
- V. India has emerged as a global leader in conducting court hearing through Video Conferencing. The District & Subordinate courts heard 2,48,21,789 cases while the High Courts heard 90,21,629 cases (totalling 3.38 crore) till 31.10.2024 using video conferencing system. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India held 7,54,443 hearings from 23.03.2020 to 04.06.2024 through video conferencing. VC facilities have also been enabled between 3240 court complexes and corresponding 1272 jails.
- VI. Live Streaming of court proceedings has been started in High Courts of Gujarat, Gauhati, Orissa, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Patna, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Calcutta & Hon'ble Supreme Court of India thus allowing media and other interested persons to join the proceedings.
- VII. e-filing system (version 3.0) has been rolled out with upgraded features for lawyers to access and upload documents related to the cases from any location 24X7.
- VIII. e-Filing of cases requires the option for electronic payment of fees which includes court fees, fines and penalties which are directly payable to the Consolidated Fund. Therefore e-Payment system was launched for hassle free transfer of fee etc.
- IX. To bridge the digital divide, 1394 eSewa Kendras (Facilitation Centres) in District Courts and 36 eSewa Kendras (Facilitation Centres) in High Courts have been rolled out to provide citizen centric services to lawyers and litigants. It also assists the litigants in accessing online e-Courts services and acts as a saviour for those who cannot afford the technology or are located in far-flung areas. It also aids to addresses the challenges caused by illiteracy among citizens at large. It will provide benefits in saving time, avoidance of exertion, travelling long distances, and saving cost by offering facilities of e-filing of cases across the country, to conduct the hearing virtually, scanning, accessing e-Courts services etc.

X. 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.

XI. A new “Judgment Search” portal has been started with features such as search by Bench, Case Type, Case Number, Year, Petitioner/ Respondent Name, Judge Name, Act, Section, Decision: From Date, To Date and Full Text Search. This facility is being provided free of cost to all.

The eCourts Phase III (2023-2027) Project has been approved by the Union Cabinet in September, 2023 at an outlay of ₹7,210 crore, which is over four times the funding for Phase II. The project envisages various new digital initiatives such as establishment of Digital and Paperless Courts that aim to bring court proceedings under a digital format in a court, digitization of court records both legacy records and pending cases, expansion of video conferencing facilities to courts, jails and hospitals, scope of online courts beyond adjudication of traffic violations, saturation of all court complexes with eSewa kendras, state of the art and latest Cloud based data repository for easy retrieval and supporting the digitized court records, software applications, live streaming, and electronic evidence etc., use of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence and its subsets like Optical Character Recognition (OCR) etc. for analysis of case pendency, forecasting future litigation, etc. Thus, the efforts of the Government of integrating technology with the governance may prove to be a game changer in eCourts Phase III, ensuring ease of justice by making the Court experience convenient, inexpensive and hassle free to all the citizens of the country. Under eCourts Phase III, an amount of Rs. 825 crores were allotted in FY 23-24 and expenditure of Rs 768.25 Cr (93.11%) was made. During F.Y.2024-25, an allocation of Rs 1500.00 Cr. in the B.E. has been received, of which Rs. 1232.19 Cr. has been released to the various High Courts so far.

Additionally, as per Section 39 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, the responsibility to prepare guidelines for engaging psychologists, social workers, and other experts to assist children during pre-trial and trial stages lies with the State Governments.

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