

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

**LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION No. *286
TO BE ANSWERED ON FRIDAY, THE 5thAUGUST 2022**

Virtual Hearing of Cases in Courts

***286. DR. PRITAM GOPINATHRAO MUNDE:
SHRI CHANDRA SEKHAR SAHU:**

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

(a) whether the courts in the country have been hearing cases virtually since the COVID-19 pandemic and post pandemic in the country and if so, the details thereof;

(b) the details of the software being used for virtual hearings in courts in the country;

(c) the extent to which the software being used is safe and beyond security risk to the country;

(d) whether the Ministry proposes to involve the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in development of an indigenous software to handle virtual court hearing in the country and if so, the details thereof; and

(e) whether the Government also proposes to invite private companies to develop Artificial Intelligence systems capable of supporting bulk documentation and sophisticated use of graphics of courts and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE
(SHRI KIREN RIJJU)**

(a) to (e): A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PART (a) TO (e) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *286 FOR 05TH AUGUST, 2022 REGARDING VIRTUAL HEARING OF CASES IN COURTS

(a): Video conferencing emerged as the mainstay of the Courts during the Covid lockdown period as physical hearings and normal court proceedings in the congregational mode were not possible. Since Covid lockdown started, the District courts heard 1,28,76,549 cases while the High Courts heard 63,76,561 cases (totalling 1.92 cr) till 30.04.2022 using video conferencing. The Supreme Court held 2,61,338 hearings till 13.06.2022 since the beginning of lockdown period. To bring about uniformity and standardization in the conduct of VC, an overarching order was passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India on 6th April 2020 which gave legal sanctity and validity to the court hearings done through VC. Further, VC rules were framed by a 5-judge committee which was circulated to all the High Courts for adoption after local contextualization. One video conference equipment each has been provided to all Court Complexes including taluk level courts and additionally funds have been sanctioned for additional VC equipment for 14,443 court rooms. Funds for setting up 2506 VC Cabins have been made available. Additional 1500 VC Licenses have been acquired. VC facilities are already enabled between 3240 court complexes and corresponding 1272 jails.

(b): The Courts across the country are presently using various video conferencing platforms such as Vidyio, Jitsi Meet, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Cisco WebEx etc. to conduct virtual hearings through video conferencing

(c): The Supreme Court in its decision in Justice K S Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India has held that right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms governed by Part III of the Constitution. To balance the right of privacy, right to

information and data security, a Sub-Committee consisting of six judges of the High Courts, assisted by technical working group members consisting domain experts, has been constituted by the Chairperson of the e-Committee to suggest/recommend secure connectivity and authentication mechanisms for data protection to preserve the right to privacy. The Sub-Committee will critically assess and examine the digital infrastructure, network and service delivery solutions created under the e- Courts project and propose solutions for strengthening data security to prevent unauthorized access to data and to protect the privacy of citizens.

(d): As part of “Atma Nirbhar App Challenge” undertaken by MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) to develop Indian made Video Conferencing software, it has been informed that NIC is also exploring the option of implementation of Bharat VC for eCourts which is powered by Indian product of M/S Techgentsia and it is under trial for use as uniform Video Conferencing platform. The test version of the same has been made available for use on www.bharatvc.nic.in. Customisation is being done for making it user friendly in court environment. User feedback is being collected to make improvements in the software. NIC is also developing its own product “NICMeet” which is available on www.nicmeet.nic.in using FOSS software.

(e): The eCommittee of Supreme Court of India, headed by a Supreme Court Judge, is responsible for the policy planning, strategic direction and guidance for implementation of eCourts project. Department of Justice releases funds to High Courts on the recommendation of eCommittee of Supreme Court of India. To explore the use of AI in judicial domain, the Supreme Court of India has constituted Artificial Intelligence Committee which has mainly identified application of AI technology in Translation of judicial documents; Legal research assistance and Process automation.