**ADDRESS BY HON'BLE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE
AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ICT IN LAW FOR DIGITAL INDIA & MAKE IN INDIA
ORGANISED BY CMAI ASSOCIATION OF INDIA
ON 20TH MAY, 2015 AT INDIA INTERNATIONAL
CENTER, NEW DELHI.**

It is a matter of delight for me to be here at this Conference to be amongst the galaxy of leaders of the legal education.

An independent, just and efficient legal system that fosters respect for the rule of law is indispensable in large democracy like ours. Modernization, streamlining and improved efficiency of court systems are paramount in order to ensure high degree of protection of individual rights and therefore increase citizens' confidence and faith in the State. In order to bring radical reforms in our judicial system, technological developments are the need of hour and same cannot be allowed to wait any longer. There is an immediate need for exposing legal profession, judicial fraternity and court management to the modern technology so as to render effective and speedier justice to all sections of the society and particularly downtrodden sections.

E-governance brings empowerment, equity and efficiency. The backbone of our Government's new ways of working will be a Digital India. IT will be used to drive re-engineering of Government processes to improve service delivery and programme implementation. Our Government is committed to adopt a multi-prolonged approach to address the problem of high pendency of cases in our judicial system. It will progressively modernize the

courts to improve their operational efficiency and start vital reforms to make dispensation of justice simpler, quicker and more effective.

Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modiji launched an ambitious programme - 'Digital India' to "transform India into digitally empowered society and knowledge economy". Envisaged by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (Deity), the programme will be implemented in phases from the current year till 2018.

Digital India is transformational in nature and is aimed at ensuring that the Government services by and from its Agencies are available to citizens electronically. It also envisions providing a "digital identity" that is "unique, lifelong and online". The overall vision of this programme is to seamlessly integrate Ministries and Departments to provide easy and a single window access.

Another ambitious programme launched by our esteemed Prime Minister is 'Make in India' which is a stepping stone towards making India an investment hub. It is new national programme designed to transform India into a global manufacturing destination. The programme aims to urge companies, local as well as global, to invest in India and make the country a manufacturing powerhouse. The focus is on creating jobs and skill enhancement in almost all sectors. Our Prime Minister has urged *"FDI" should be understood as "First Develop India" along with "Foreign Direct Investment."*

Judiciary has an important role in the success of Hon'ble Prime Minister's Make-In-India campaign which aims at making India a favourable investment destination. The eCourts Integrated Mission Mode Project is one of the National eGovernance projects, being

implemented for ICT enablement of district and subordinate courts of the country. The project approved in the year 2010 envisaged computerization of 14,249 district and subordinate courts with budget of Rs. 935 crore.

The objective of the eCourts project is to provide designated services to litigants, lawyers and the judiciary. Currently, litigants can access case status information in respect of over 3 crore pending and decided cases in more than 11,000 courts. Litigants and lawyers are also provided services through Judicial Service Centre at the court complexes such as case filing, certified copies of orders and judgments, case status etc.

As on 31st January, 2015, out of 14,249 courts to be computerized -

- Sites for 14,249 courts (100%) have been made ready for computerization.
- LAN has been installed at 13,619 courts (95.6%), hardware at 13,436 (94.3%) and software at 13.323 courts (93.5%).
- ICT infrastructure of the Supreme Court and High Courts has also been upgraded.
- More than 14000 Judicial Officers and more than 4000 court staff have been trained and Laptops have been provided to 14,309 Judicial Officers.

Phase I of the eCourts Project is completed. We have still some challenges to meet.

- There is adverse perception in the minds of investors due to worrisome backlog of more than 3 crore pending cases.

- The actual strength of Judicial Officers is 15,000 against the sanctioned strength of 20,000. There is urgent need for innovative action to fill up vacancies.

- Entries on National Judicial Data Grid(NJDG) are not complete. Category-wise case data needs to be made available.

- There is urgent need for process re-engineering to simplify court procedures.

- Many CrPC/CPC provisions on issue of summons and adjournments are not being followed.

The purpose of speedy justice will not be achieved unless we undertake process re-engineering. What we have done so far is supplying computers to the courts and providing data entry operators to do whatever was being done so far in manual form. The only benefit is with regard to obtaining certified copies of orders and judgments, searching the status of the case etc.

Phase II of eCourts project is also under process which envisages further ICT enhancement through universal computerization of all the courts. The project is proposed to be completed in the three year duration within the estimated cost of Rs. 2765 crore. Approval of EFC has been obtained for Rs. 1670 crore for Phase II of the eCourts Project. It is hoped that the State Governments will provide funds for technical manpower in court complexes. At the end of Phase II, we hope –

- Litigants can e-file cases and can access digitally signed judgments.
- E-service of notices and summons will be facilitated by technology.
- Cloud computing will enable analysis for improved court management.
- There will be universal computerization and ICT enablement of Judiciary.

However, this is not enough. We will have to undertake complete process re-engineering with the intervention of ICT in such a way that the current reasons for delay in disposal of cases are addressed My experience is that so far eCourts Project has not achieved the desired result. We are working in tendem with the judiciary and have set up eCourts Committee which is looking into all the aspects. Since computerization is not just providing computers and developing better software but to facilitate the process from filing of the case till judgment through the online system.

I am confidant that participants in the Conference will put forth useful suggestions on reforms in judiciary and legal system by application of ICT. I thank the organisers for inviting me on this occasion and I wish the Conference all and every success in achieving its objectives.

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