

# Video link speeds up hearing of 51,000 trials

## It Has Helped Govt Save Over Rs 8 Cr In 15 Months: CAG Report

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government's decision to link select jails and courts through video-conferencing has paid off. Not only has it ensured a speedy hearing for 51,000 undertrials, but technology has also helped the state government save Rs 8 crore, which would otherwise have been spent on shuttling prisoners to the courts and back.

This was recorded by auditors of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), who worked out the cost-benefit analysis of the DF government's video-conferencing plans.

Maharashtra was among the first states to announce the video conferencing link-up of three jails—Arthur Road, Byculla and the Thane prison—with as many as 14 courts. State home minister R R Patil had then said that the use of technology would save time, manpower and money spent on moving prisoners to the courts.

Till May 2007, Patil's decision has helped the home department save Rs 8.57 crore since the video-conferencing system was launched in February 2006, the CAG report says.

The state government, however, seems to have failed to carry forward the model plan. In fact, a high-powered committee headed by chief secretary and addi-



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tional chief secretaries of home, finance and other departments had in September 2004 resolved to instal video-conferencing systems in all the courts and jails

to ensure that all undertrials get speedy hearings and do not languish behind bars for want of safe escorts.

The decision, however, was partly implemented, resulting in a loss of over Rs 1 crore to the state exchequer.

According to CAG auditors, the law and judiciary department as well as the registrar of Bombay high court ensured the speedy implementation of the decision. Video-conferencing facilities were installed in 29 district courts as part of the computerisation scheme costing the state Rs 93.38 lakh. In addition, a recurring expenditure to the tune of Rs 34,800 per month was paid by the state to the BSNL from July 2005, the CAG report adds.

However, the prison authorities failed to implement the decision. "It resulted in underutilisation of the systems installed in the district courts rendering the expenditure of Rs 93.38 lakh incurred on them unfruitful," CAG said.

The total loss to the state exchequer is upward of Rs 1 crore, considering the loss of Rs 8.55 lakh expenditure on rent payable to the BSNL for installing the dedicated Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) lines. "Had the department (home) installed the video-conferencing systems in the 28 jails, substantial amounts would have been saved during the past two years," the report said.

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