

Launch of virtual hearing in quasi-judicial cases under EPF & MP Act, 1952 heralds an era of providing expeditious and affordable adjudication

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Launch of virtual hearing in quasi-judicial cases under EPF & MP Act, 1952 has now heralded an era of providing expeditious and affordable adjudication.

This is part of a series of initiatives taken by EPFO to improve the ease of doing business, a new facility for conducting virtual hearing in quasi-judicial cases by use of secure IT applications, which was launched by Sh. Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Minister of State (I/C), Labour and Employment in 227th meeting of Central Board of Trustees, Employees' Provident Fund, conducted virtually on 9th September 2020.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and need to practice social distancing restrictions, virtual hearings are being conducted in most of the district and sessions courts. This is as per the guidelines of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and the concerned High Courts to ensure timely disposal of the cases during pandemic. In the same spirit and with a view to provide expeditious and affordable adjudication to its establishments and subscribers, hearings under sections 7A and 14B of Employees' Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, will be conducted in virtual mode.

Virtual court is a concept aimed at eliminating need for physical presence of litigant and lawyers by facilitating adjudication of the case through online mode.

To facilitate this, virtual hearing utilities have been integrated with EPFO's e-Court process on Compliance e-Proceedings Portal (<https://eproceedings.epfindia.gov.in>). This will facilitate issue of e-notices, real time recording of proceedings and communication of orders. Case status including the daily and final orders will now be accessible to all parties on the portal.

There are several benefits of hearing through video conferencing including no requirement of physical presence wherein parties do travel miles to be present in person for hearing and at the same time, it will be cost and time effective for the employers. Most importantly this will reduce carbon footprint. Digitization will reduce the number of pendency of cases and will be an effective remedy for delayed justice.

In addition, unnecessary adjournments due to non-appearance of parties could now be avoided resulting in fast tracking of dispute resolution and assessment of dues of workers to generate better confidence in the quasi-judicial mechanism. Hearing in online mode is a move towards the ultimate objective of faceless assessment.

The launch was made after successful pilot run of the same at two regional offices of EPFO in the months of July & August, 2020. During the pilot run, virtual hearings were conducted through online meeting utilities in 90 quasi-judicial cases, which were attended by higher management of establishments leading to quick disposals, consent orders and immediate compliances. Employers have appreciated the ease and convenience of participation in virtual hearings particularly during pandemic.

EPFO is continuously making endeavors to use the latest trends and technologies by effectively harnessing its in-house capabilities to extend nirbadh i.e. seamless services to stakeholders during Covid-19 pandemic.

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