

भारत निर्वाचन आयोग
ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA
निर्वाचन सदन, अशोक रोड, नई दिल्ली-110001
Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001

No. 51/8/16/RVM/2021-EDPS

Datad: 28 /12/2022

To,

President/Chairperson/General Secretary of
All National/State Political Parties

**Sub: - Discussion on improving voter participation of domestic
migrants using remote voting - Reg.**

Madam/Sir,

1. India is the World's largest democracy. The Constitution of India provides universal adult suffrage to its citizens, as enshrined in Article 326 of the Constitution of India, irrespective of race, religion, gender, economic status etc. A good measure of an established democracy, *inter alia*, are (i) registration of all eligible citizens as electors and (ii) maximum participation of electors in voting. India has witnessed an increasing trend in last 75 years, on both the counts, as shown in the following Table of select General Elections to the Lok Sabha:

Year of election	Registered Electors (Crores)	Voter turnout (%)
1951	17.32	45.67
1957	19.37	47.74
1962	21.64	55.42
2009	71.70	58.21
2014	83.40	66.44
2019	91.20	67.40

2. Despite the above-mentioned increase in electoral registration and voter, the concern of participation stagnating is manifest. In effect, one third of the voters do not vote. In other words, approximately one out of every three voters do not participate in the direct electoral process of exercising his or her vote. This translates to a high figure of about 30 Crore voters. The variations in voter turnout in the States/ UTs in the latest two General Elections to the Lok Sabha:

Voter Turnout	40-50%	50-60%	60-70%	70-80%	80-90%	All States/UTs
	Number of States					
GE-2014	1	2	12	12	8	35
GE-2019	1	2	11	12	10	36

3. The Election Commission of India is committed to its goal of ‘No voter to be left behind’. For enhancing the voter facilitations, the Commission has been taking various measures like providing assured minimum facilities at the polling stations, extended voter awareness through various flagship SVEEP activities, providing postal ballots to various categories of voters including the Service Voters, home voting facilities provided to senior citizens (80+ years of age) and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), etc aimed at improving the voter participation in elections. Commission is also focussing on youth, urban apathy and geographical constraints.

4. The Commission has been always concerned about the issue of about 30 Crore electors not exercising their franchise and differential voter turnout in different States/UTs. It is understood that there are multifarious reasons for a voter not exercising franchise. Amongst the many reasons like urban apathy and youth apathy, inability to vote due to internal migration (domestic migrants) is also one prominent reason contributing to low voter turnout.

5. Internal migration is one of the assessed important reasons required to be addressed to improve voter turnout in low voter turnout States. This is likely because the internal migrants or broadly the voters who are absent at their home locations on the day of polling, even if they wish to vote at their home location, they are *unable* to travel to home location to vote due to various reasons.

6. It is pertinent to mention that there are enough provisions in electoral laws to let the people vote at their place of “ordinary residence” by way of enrolling themselves in Electoral Rolls of their place of ordinary residence, with protection from deregistration due to “temporary absence”. The migrants, however, are many times reluctant to get themselves enrolled at their place of work for various reasons such as routinely changing residences, not enough social and emotional connect with the issues of area of migration, unwillingness to get their

name deleted in electoral roll of their home/native constituencies as they have permanent residence/property etc. It is to be noted that legal construct of any constituency is territorial and based on place of ordinary residency.

7. Hon'ble Supreme Court's vide order dated 25/06/2015 in WP No.80 of 2013 and IA No.3 in WP No.265 of 2014, *Dr. Shamsheer V.P. versus Union of India* on the matter of alleged denial of voting opportunities to the domestic migrants, had inter-alia directed the Commission to explore options of ***Remote Voting for domestic migrants***.

8. However, domestic migrant/ internal migrant does not form *a uniquely identifiable and countable class* in the existing norms and standard definition. There is no central database available for migration within the country for the purpose as required for the matter under discussion. The Registrar General of India, the Ministry of Labour and Employment and National Sample Survey Organisation lay different meanings to the term "migrant". In the existing multiple meanings of "migrant", periodicity and purpose of "absence" from the place of origin lacks clarity. As per Census 2011, 45.36 Crore Indians (37 per cent) in India are migrants i.e., now settled in a place different from their previous residence, however, 75% of such migrations are on account of marriages and family related reasons. It is also to be noted that internal out migration is predominant among the rural population and it is mostly intra-State (approximately 85%). While recognising limitation of the data, broadly it can be concluded that:

- (i) Major portion of internal migration is due to marriages and family related matters, followed by work related and education related migration.
- (ii) Majority of migration is within State (>85%)
- (iii) Rural out migration dominates
- (iv) Domestic out migration is related to few States and districts/clusters

9. In the above legal and administrative context as above, the Commission had formed a "Committee of Officers on Domestic Migrants". The Committee held a meeting with the representatives of recognised national political parties on 29th August, 2016 and examined the problems and measures for electoral participation of domestic migrants. The Committee has also relied on the studies made by Tata Institute of Social Sciences on the subject of domestic migrations and issues in election participation. Committee has deliberations with various relevant Ministries/ Organisations and experts. The Committee submitted its Report in November, 2016. In the Report, while various solutions like internet voting, proxy voting,

early voting and postal ballot for the migrant voters were considered, the Committee, however, did not recommend any of these methods for various reasons. The concluding recommendations of the Committee were about creating a robust electoral roll so that there is only one registration per voter, developing requisite technology for two ways electronically transmitted postal ballot in controlled environment and amendment of laws so that sufficient time is available to the election machinery for pre-registration of such electors. This underlines complexities and issues involved in *Remote Voting for domestic migrants*.

10. Remote voting, in the extant legal scheme, covers options provided for not voting in-person at designated polling station by voting using postal ballot *from within the constituency* for senior citizens, PwDs, covid-affected and personnel of essential services (**Rule 18** of Conduct of Election Rules 1961). Postal ballot facility for voting from *outside constituency* is only available to distinctly identifiable and countable categories like Service Voters, Special Office holders, persons on election duty and persons under preventive detention (**Rule 27E, 27 I** of Conduct of Election Rules 1961). Controlled environment is provided to ensure secrecy of voting and inducement free voting in case of postal ballots provided under Rule 18 as above. Remote voting in international context also means option available to certain class of voters for early voting in-person at designated locations or voting through postal ballot or electronic mails.

11. It is evident that empowering the migrant voters to exercise their franchise from their places of work entails a host of legal, statutory, administrative and technological interventions on spectrum of issues requiring wider consultations with all Stake holders. The issues *inter alia* requiring wider consultations for acceptable solutions to the complex problem of increasing voter participation beyond current level are as under:

(i) Who is domestic migrant:

- a. dimensions of duration (poll day absence to permanently shifted) and purpose and how to retain registration at original place in the context of “ordinary residence” and “temporary absence” legal construct
- b. How to identify such domestic migrant and make it unique, can remote voting be extended as an optional facility based on application for every election
- c. Are all domestic migrants eligible to vote remotely?

(ii) What is remote voting:

- a. How to deal with territorial constituency concept in the context of remote voting

- b. Definition of remoteness: outside constituency, outside district or outside state
- (iii) How to implement MCC in remote location (other State) where election process is not going on.
- (iv) How to provide controlled environment to ensure secrecy of voting and inducement-free voting. How many such remote booths should be set up. Who should be appointed as polling personnel.
- (v) How to provide facility of polling agents to candidates for voting at such controlled remote locations and ensure identification of voters to avoid impersonation
- (vi) Method of remote voting/ voting technology:
 - a. What should be remote voting method: postal ballot (ETPBS), internet voting or Remote Voting Machine in line of EVMs
 - b. How to count votes cast at remote booths and transmit to Returning Officer located remotely (in other State).

11. On the matter of voting technology for the migrant voters, various options like two-way physical transit postal ballots, proxy voting, early voting in special Early Voting Centres, one-way or two-way electronic transmission of postal ballots (ETPBS), Internet-based voting system and so on were explored and considered by the Commission. However, considering various aspects like robustness and integrity of the system, familiarity of the voters with the method, availability of a time-tested credible technology and faith of voters and political parties alike, with the guidance of the Technical Expert Committee on EVM, the Commission has explored the option of using a modified version of the existing model of M3 EVMs to enable voting at remote polling stations i.e. polling stations outside home constituency, for domestic migrants. Accordingly, the Commission has been working with the two Public Sector Units, who are manufacturing the existing EVMs, i.e., Bharat Electronic Limited (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) to develop a robust, failproof and efficient stand-alone system for remote voting based on the existing EVMs, under the guidance of the Technical Expert Committee. M/s. Electronics Corporation of India Limited under the Department of Atomic Energy has developed a prototype of Multi-Constituency Remote EVM (RVM), i.e., a modified form of EVM that could handle multiple constituencies (72) in a single remote polling booth.

12. The proposed RVM system would enable the domestic migrants to participate in elections in their home constituencies, from their remote locations itself i.e., the places of their work etc. For example, say a voter from State A is working in State B, and elections of his home

state i.e., State A has been announced. With the RVM system that is being planned, the voter would have the facility to vote for his home constituency of State A, from special remote voting booths set up in State B itself. These remote voting booths would also cater to voters of multiple constituencies of State A. Remote Polling Booths may as a pilot be set up within the State in an election to the state legislature to tackle the issue of migrant voter within the State. The migrant voter need not travel back to his/her home state/ district/ constituency to exercise his/her franchise of voting. A detailed note on the proposed explored solution is annexed as **Annexure-I**.

12. In the context as above and desirability of ensuring that domestic migrants are able to exercise their franchise to improve participation and deepen democracy further, the Commission desires to solicit the views of the Recognised National and State Political Parties, as the most important stake holders in the electoral process, in the matter to effectively recommend required legislative changes, changes in administrative procedures and finalise voting method/ technology. Accordingly, it is requested to

- (i) Depute two representatives to participate in the discussion and demonstration organised on **16th January 2023 (Monday)**, in presence of Commission and Technical Expert Committee, as per Schedule/ Venue mentioned in **Annexure-II**.
- (ii) Convey the views on issues highlighted in the letter for legal, administrative and statutory changes to bring in clarity on the subject, by **31st January 2023 (Tuesday)**, preferably in the format annexed at **Annexure-III**

Yours faithfully,



(B. C. PATRA)
SECRETARY

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Phone: 011-23052079

REMOTE VOTING MACHINE (RVM) SYSTEM - TECHNICAL FEATURES

RVM system allows migrated voters to exercise their franchise in their home constituency elections on the same day of polling from their current residence.

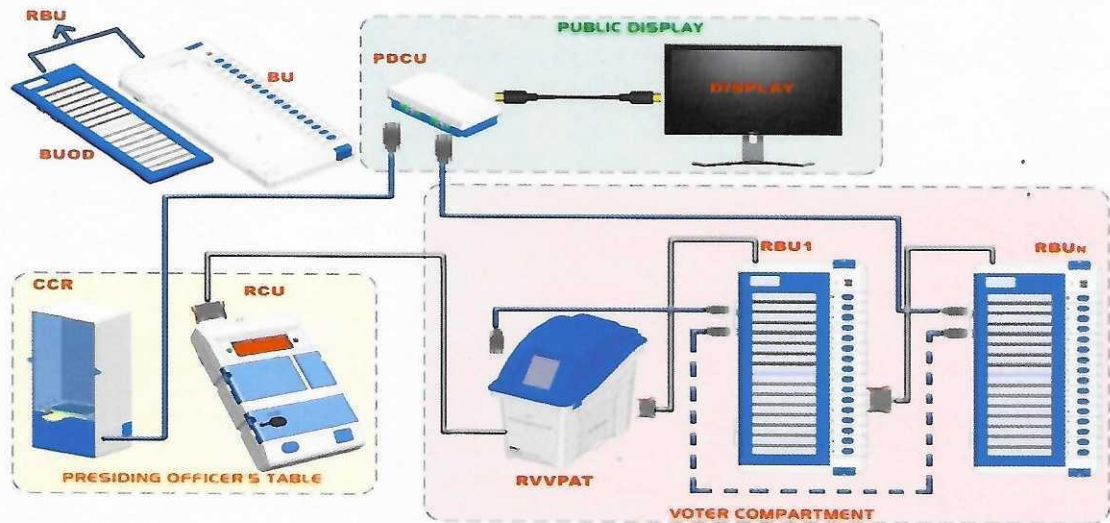
Proposed RVM voting method:

- Remote Voter has to pre-register for remote voting facility by applying online/offline within a pre-notified time before elections with his home constituency RO.
- Voter details will be verified at home constituency and the voter's request for remote voting will be approved after successful verification by marking him/her as remote voter to participate as remote voter in a remote location (a location other than the voter's home constituency).
- Special multi-constituency remote voting polling stations will be set up in the places of their current residence. (At the remote location, away from their ordinarily residence as per the EPIC; Outside the voter's home constituency)

RVM Features:

- It is a standalone, non-networked system having same security features as the existing Indian EVMs and provides the same voting experience to the voter as EVM. RVM system is essentially a modified version of the existing EVM system.
- RVM will be used in multi constituency polling stations set up in the remote locations. A single Ballot Unit (BU) can cater multiple AC/PC s at a single polling station by using dynamic Ballot display instead of the usual printed paper ballot sheet on BU.
- RVM contains following components
 - 1) RCU-Remote Control Unit
 - 2) RBU-Remote Ballot Unit
 - 3) RVVPAT-Remote Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail
 - 4) CCR-Constituency Card Reader
 - 5) PDCU-public display control unit
 - 6) RSLU-Remote Symbol Loading unit

Block diagram of RVM:



RBU: Remote Ballot unit consists of the electronic dynamic display (BUOD) instead of fixed Ballot paper sheet in a BU, BUOD (Ballot unit overlay Display) can dynamically display the list of candidates based on the Constituency number read by the Constituency card reader.

RCU: Remote Control unit has similar controls like existing CU, in addition to that, RCU can store the result of Total number of votes as per candidate and Constituency wise.

RVVPAT: RVVPAT has similar functionality like existing M3 VVPAT, in addition to that it can store symbols of different AC/PCs with candidate images.

RSLU: Remote Symbol Loading unit is used to capture symbols of Remote AC/PC s Candidates from Laptops under the control of Home RO, the same symbols will be loaded in to RVVPAT under the control of Remote RO.

CCR: Constituency Card reader (CCR) is a barcode reader to read the constituency number of a particular voter coming to the multi constituency Polling station. It is connected to PDCU unit.

PDCU: Public display control unit acts as interface between CCR, Public display and RBU. the list of candidates of particular constituency of the voter will be displayed on public display and RBU simultaneously as soon as voters particular constituency card read by CCR.

Proposed Commissioning process:

- The electronic ballot will be created by the Home ROs based on the ballot paper that has been finalised after candidature withdrawal period, and it will be forwarded to the Remote RO. Remote RO will load all constituency symbols into the RSLUs.
- During the loading of symbols in presence of representatives of political parties / candidates by RSLU onto RVVPAT, the symbols could be viewed on a screen/monitor by all stakeholders in real time as per the existing practice.

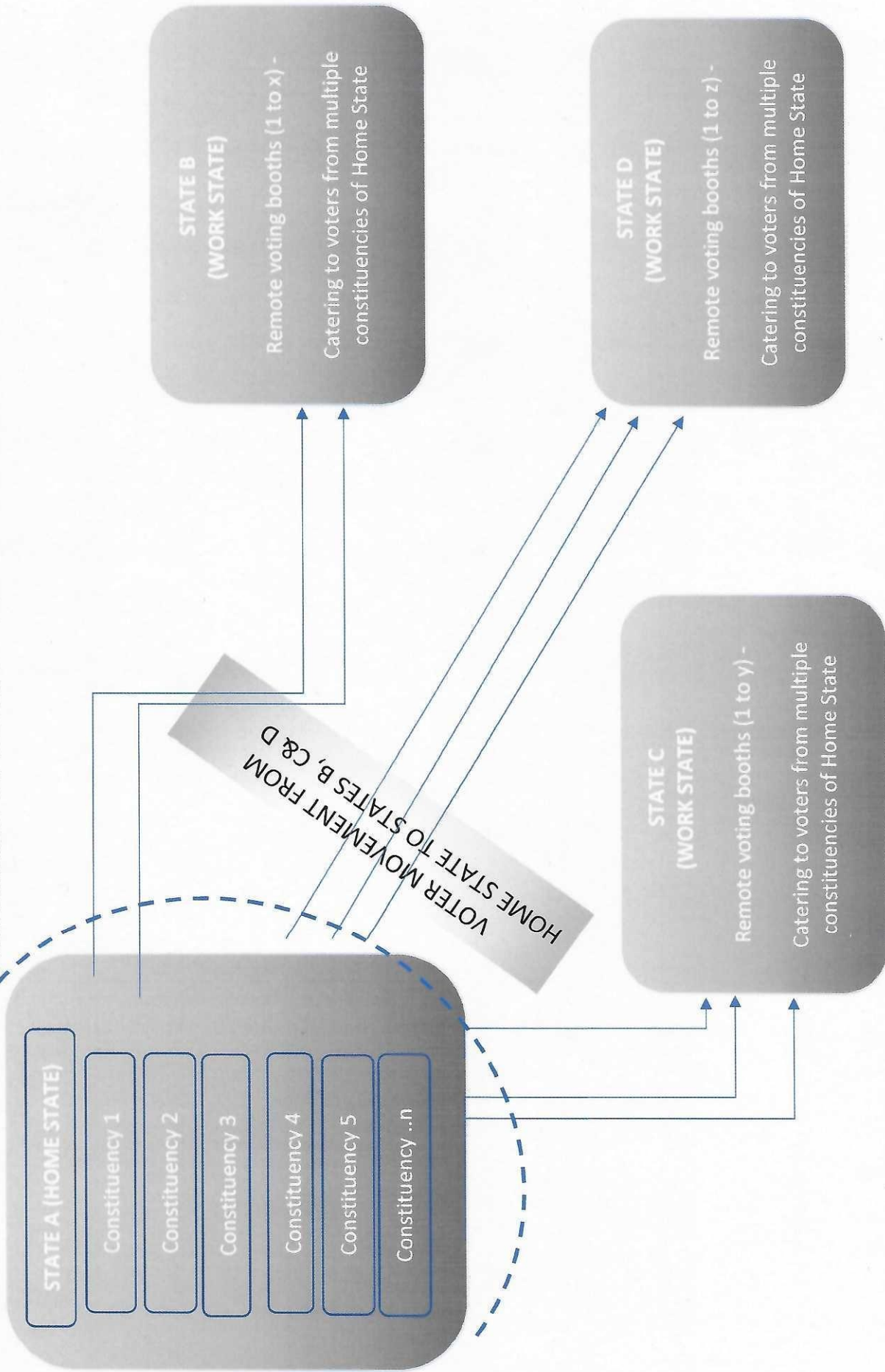
Proposed Voting process:

- After verifying the identity of the voter, the Presiding Officer scans his/her Constituency card using CCR.
- After scanning, the ballot sheet details for the respective constituency will be shown on a big screen using the Public Display Unit and also on the RBU.
- The above display will change dynamically based on the constituency card read by the CCR.
- The Remoter Voter selects the candidate button of his or her choice on the RBU.
- The vote is recorded along with the State Code, Constituency Number, and Candidate Number in RCU.
- In addition to the standard information (candidate name, symbol, and serial number), RVVPAT prints the state code and constituency code on the slip.

Counting Process of RVM:

- For the particular multi-constituency Remote PS, the RCU records the total votes for each candidate in each Constituency.
- It displays the total votes for each Constituency, one by one, in sequential order of candidates in that constituency.
- The results will be shared with the appropriate home ROs.

SCHEMATIC OF REMOTE VOTING CONCEPT



**Different States B, C, D may have requirement of different numbers of booths x, y, z respectively depending on number of voters registering for remote voting

DISCUSSION AND DEMONSTRATION SCHEDULE

Date: 16th January 2023 (Monday) 11:00 am

Venue: Vigyan Bhavan (Hall-5), New Delhi

Time	Activity
11:00 AM to 11.30 AM	Presentation of Remote Voting for Domestic Migrants
11.30 AM to 11.45 PM	High Tea
11.45 AM to 01:00 PM	Demonstration of Multi-Constituency Remote Voting Machine (RVM) Prototype and discussion/feedback
01.00 PM to 01.30 PM	Address by Hon'ble Commission

(Meeting will be followed by Lunch)

FEEDBACK FORM - REMOTE VOTING

S.No	Subject/Issues	Feedback/Comments
1	Suggestions or comments on desirability of remote voting facility to domestic migrants	
2.	<p><u>How to define domestic migrant:</u></p> <p>a. dimensions of duration (poll day absence to permanently shifted) and purpose and how to retain registration at original place in the context of “ordinary residence” and “temporary absence” legal construct</p> <p>b. How to identify such domestic migrant and make it unique, can remote voting be extended as an optional facility based on application for every election by willing domestic migrant</p> <p>c. Are all domestic migrants eligible to vote remotely</p>	
3.	<p><u>How to define remote voting:</u></p> <p>a. How to deal with territorial constituency concept in the context of remote voting</p> <p>b. Definition of remoteness: outside constituency,</p>	

	outside district or outside state	
4.	Suggestions on how to implement MCC in remote location (other State) where election process is not going on.	
5.	Suggestion on how to provide controlled environment to ensure secrecy of voting and inducement-free voting in the form of Remote Polling Booth. Suggestion on number and location of such remote booths to be set up. Suggestion on who should be appointed as polling personnel (from home State or host State)	
6.	How to provide facility of polling agents to candidates for voting at such Remote Polling Booths and ensure identification of voters to avoid impersonation	
7.	Suggestion on remote voting method: postal ballot (ETPBS), internet voting or Remote Voting Machine in line of EVMs	
8.	How to count votes cast at remote booths and transmit to Returning Officer located remotely (in other State).	
9.	Any other suggestions related to legal, statutory and procedural aspects	

**The feedback form may be submitted by 31st January 2023 to:

(i) Email route: bcpatra@eci.gov.in

(ii) Postal route: B C Patra, Secretary, Election Commission of India, Nirvachan Sadan, Ashok Road, New Delhi 110001