

Remote voting for migrant workers

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In news— The Election Commission (EC) has recently announced that it is ready to pilot remote voting for domestic migrants, so they don't have to travel back to their home states to vote.

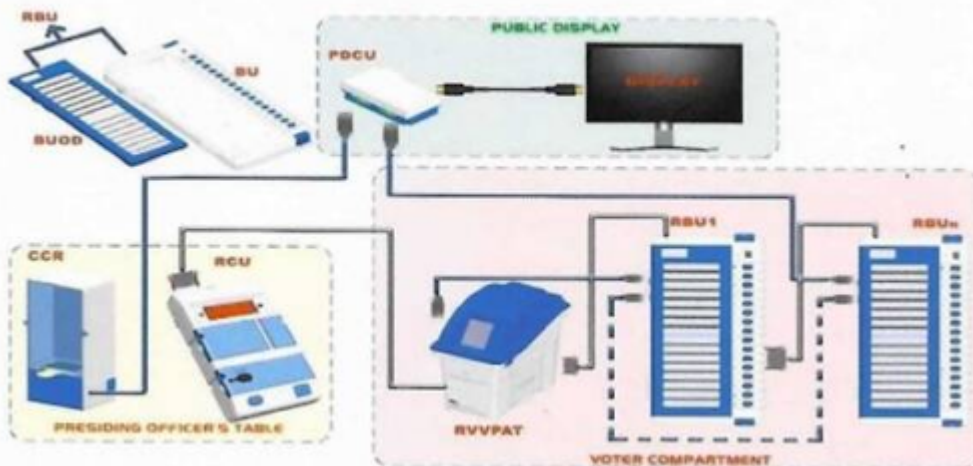
About the pilot remote voting plan-

- The commission has developed a prototype for a **Multi-Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM)** that can handle multiple constituencies from a single remote polling booth.
- The EC has invited all recognised eight national and 57 state political parties on January 16 to demonstrate the functioning of the RVM and has asked for their written views by January 31.
- **The EC had formed a "Committee of Officers on Domestic Migrants"**, which submitted a report in late 2016 after considering various possible solutions such as internet voting, proxy voting, early voting and postal ballots for migrant workers.
- However, all of these ideas were rejected due to reasons such as the lack of secrecy of the vote, the lack of sanctity of one person one vote principle, issues of accessibility for unlettered voters, etc.
- Thus, a technological solution was proposed which relies on the creation of a robust electoral roll and identification mechanisms (to stop duplicate voting), and allow voters to vote remotely, in a safe and controlled environment.
- **The RVM was developed with the assistance of Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and the Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL).** It is based on the

currently used EVM system.

- As per EC, the **RVMs are “stand alone, non-networked systems,”** effectively providing the voter the same experience as currently used EVMs.
- They will be set up in remote locations outside the state under similar conditions as current polling booths.

Block diagram of RVM:



- The unique feature of RVMs is that a **single Remote Ballot Unit (RBU) will be able to cater to multiple constituencies** (as many as 72) by using a **“dynamic ballot display board”** instead of the usual printed paper ballot sheet on EVMs.
- The Ballot Unit Overlay Display (BUOD) will show the requisite candidates based on the constituency number read on the voter's Constituency card.
- **A barcode scanning system will be used to read these cards.**
- **The voting process will be as follows:** after verifying a voter's identity, their constituency card will be read with a public display showing the constituency details and candidates.
- This will also be displayed privately, on the BUOD in the RVM's RBU. The voter will then vote and each vote will be stored constituency-wise in the control unit of

the voting machine.

- The VVPAT system is expected to work along the same lines with the new technology.

What is the problem?

- While registered voters do not end up voting for a variety of reasons, **domestic migration is a major contributor in the Indian context.**
- **As per the 2011 census (the numbers will have risen since then), there are nearly 45.36 crore migrants in India** (both intra and inter state) – amounting to approximately 37 per cent of the country's population. Migration can be driven by a variety of different reasons from marriage to natural disaster to employment.
- According to EC's concept note for RVMs, "voters who are absent from their home locations on the day of polling, even if they wish to vote, are unable to travel to vote due to various reasons." This means that there is a large chunk of the population which is denied its franchise due to exigencies of work or lack of resources to travel. This goes directly against the EC's "No voter left behind" goal.