

**Bangladesh Election Commission**  
**Election Commission Secretariat**

**Workshop on Devising Viable Method(s) for Diaspora Voting**

1. **Context.** Bangladesh has large diaspora voters – spread across the globe. Till date, these voters have not been able exercise their voting right enshrined in the constitution, and their ever-growing demand for voting remains unmet. Paradoxically, the only existing provision (law) provides for ‘postal ballot’ – an option that has been proven inherently useless and impractical. Therefore, to materialize the diaspora voting, there is a need to enact/amend the law and devise viable method(s) for voting. Realities notwithstanding, the Interim Government (IG) and the Election Commission (EC) are earnestly trying to fulfil long-awaited demand of the diaspora. With this objective, the EC formed a committee (henceforth called ‘the committee’ in this paper) to study and recommend practicable and contemporary solutions. The committee has come up with three possible options, that, if found suitable through further study and deliberations, could be implemented in short to long term. In order to further synthesize these options, it has been decided therefore to obtain expert inputs through a workshop.

2. **Study by the Committee.**

a. **Existing Provision.** As stated ante, existing law offers diaspora voting using ‘postal ballot’ (Article 27 of ‘The Representation of the People Order, 1972’). Unfortunately, for its inherent inefficiency, hardly anyone could ever vote under this provision. The timeline of events would explain the paradox. While the postal voting (from the time the Returning Officer sends ballot to the desirous voter to the time he receives the return mail) takes 24 to 35 days. However, by the time ballots are printed and readied for dispatch, there are only 10 to 12 days left for the voting. So, the available time does not allow completing the process of postal voting before the day of election.

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b. **Diaspora Voting by Other Countries.** Around 100 countries and territories do conduct diaspora voting. Some of the rather common methods followed by these countries and territories include:

(1) **In-Person Voting.** This takes place at the mission office or at a designated place. This option is widely exercised by most of the countries.

(2) **Postal Voting.** This method is also adopted by a large number of countries.

(3) **Absentee Voting.** This is an extension of postal voting; as exercised by the USA.

(4) **Online Voting.** Till date, this method has not been universally popularized. Countries including Mexico, Estonia, the Philippines and the USA did adopt this system in varying scale. Meanwhile some of the countries including India and Pakistan are reportedly conducting trials over last few years. Yet some other countries have backtracked after the trial run.

(5) **Proxy Voting.** In this method a voter selects his/her trusted proxy (another voter from the same voting area) to vote in-person on his/her behalf. Notable ones adopting this method in varying degree include India (for the military personnel working overseas), Australia, UK, some of the EU countries including Belgium, France and the Netherlands, and, few states of Canada.

c. **Recommendations by the 'Electoral Reform Commission'.** The Reform Commission in its recommendation has suggested two options. The committee duly studied these options as well. These options are:

(1) IT Supported Postal Ballot.

(2) Online Voting.

***Note: Details of the report can be found at  
<https://cabinet.gov.bd/site/view/notices>***

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3. **Recommendations by the Committee.** The Committee has recommended three options as what follows:

a. **Postal Ballot which Can be Conducted within the Available Time.**

Voting by postal ballot involves two sets of activities; namely the registration/application for voting, and, the voting itself. The registration/application is not constrained by other activities and the desirous voters can apply in advance for the postal ballot. However, the voting, which starts with dispatching of the postal ballot, is contingent to finalization of the list of candidates, allotment of symbols, and, the printing of ballots. This is where time is at premium. Usually, a window of around 10 to 12 days are available. So, any format of 'postal ballot' has to fit in within this timeframe.

b. **Online Voting.** This method has been preferred by a sizable number of Bangladesh Missions abroad. However, when it comes to application, global experience is not so encouraging. Only a few countries are attempting it; albeit with limitations. UNDP, during the discussion with the EC, sounded skeptic about any foolproof system in near future. However, the committee recommended for a piloting to start with the process of online voting, so that, it can possibly be materialized sometimes in the future.

c. **Proxy Voting.** The committee opined that the 'proxy voting' would be a desirable method for the upcoming election. This is the only method that can be deployed globally and for maximum number of voters.

For each of the three methods mentioned above, there will be need for registration (signing up for overseas voting following a given method). Only the ones in the voter list will be able to apply for registration.

4. **The Workshop.**

a. **Date.** 08 April 2025.

b. **Location.** Electoral Training Institute (ETI), Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

c. **Objective.** Objective of the workshop is to devise viable architectures, with alternatives if necessary, for the three methods of



diaspora voting proposed by the committee. These architectures, so developed in broad outline, will subsequently be presented to the stakeholders to reach a consensus. Upon reaching agreement on the proposed architecture(s), the system will be developed fully and put in place for trial/execution.

d. **Criteria for developing the architecture.**

- (1) Integrity of the voter and the vote.
- (2) Security of the system.
- (3) Timeliness.
- (4) Ease of understanding by voters across the board.
- (5) Cost-effectiveness.
- (6) Audit trail or other form of record keeping (evidence), where needed.

e. **Presenters.**

- (1) Team from the University of Dhaka.
- (2) Team from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.
- (3) Team from Military Institute of Science and Technology.
- (4) NGOs and other relevant organizations (as invited).

f. **Oversight Team.** The 'Oversight Team' will help synthesize the presented architectures and come up with one architecture (with variants, if necessary) for each of the voting options. The 'Oversight Team' is composed as follows (listed not in order of precedence or seniority):


- (1) Dr. Md Sadek Ferdous, Member, Electoral Reform Commission.
- (2) Maj Gen Wahid-Uz-Zaman (Retd), former Commandant, MIST.
- (3) Brig Gen Saleem Ahmad Khan (Retd), former DG, NID Wing, ECS



- (4) Md. Rafiqul Hoque, System Manager (also the coordinator of the team)
- (5) Dr. Md. Monirul Islam, Professor, CSE Department, BUET
- (6) Dr. Mohammed Jakaria, Former Joint Secretary (Former Secretary (Acting), ECS
- (7) Mr. Faruque Ahmed, Joint Secretary, Law Wing, ECS
- (8) Representative, ICT Division
- (9) Representative , Ministry of Foreign Affairs

g. **Outline of the Workshop.**

- (1) 0900-0930 : Assembly and in processing.
- (2) 0930-1000 : Opening and setting the scene.
- (3) 1000-1200 : Presentations by presenters (including breaks); each presentation not exceeding 15 minutes.
- (4) 1200-1500 : Breakout session in two groups (including breaks).
- (5) 1500-1600 : Presentation of the summary.
- (6) 1600-1630 : Closing.

  
16.03.25  
Md. Rafiqul Hoque  
System Manager  
Election Commission Secretariat  
Dhaka.