

Instant Feedback to Voters through VVPAT

Voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) is a method of providing feedback to voters using a ballot less voting system. VVPAT is intended as an independent verification system for electronic voting machines that allows voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended and can serve as an additional barrier to changing or destroying votes.

Under VVPAT, a printer-like apparatus is linked to Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). When a vote is cast, a receipt is generated showing the serial number, name and symbol of the candidate. It confirms the vote and the voter can verify the details. The receipt, once viewed, goes inside a container linked to the EVM and can only be accessed by the election officers in rarest of rare cases.

The system allows a voter to challenge his or her vote on basis of the paper receipt for the first time. As per a new rule, the booth presiding officer will have to record the dissent of the voter, which would have to be taken into account at time of counting.

The VVPAT system was not manufactured due to doubts on the EVM, but was part of the up gradation of the system.

Chronology of events leading to the use of VVPAT

- In All Party Meeting held on 4th October 2010, there was a broad consensus among Political Parties about the continued use of Electronic Voting Machines and several Political Parties suggested that the possibility of incorporating a “Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail” should be explored.
- The Election Commission referred the matter to the Expert Committee to examine the possibility of a paper trail and also directed the manufacturers i.e. Bharat Electronics Limited, Bangalore (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited, Hyderabad (ECIL) to develop a prototype of VVPAT system.
- On the recommendation of Technical Experts Committee, a field trial was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram, Delhi, Jaisalmer, Cherapunjee and Leh in the month of July 2011 in the presence and participation of all stakeholders including general voters, national and state political parties, civil society organizations and media.
- After incorporation of the changes recommended after the first field trial , a second field trial of prototype VVPAT system was held in Delhi, Thiruvananthapuram, Leh, Jaisalmer and Cherapunjee in July-August, 2012. The Technical Expert Committee approved the final design of the VVPAT units in its meeting held on 19th February, 2013.
- The Government of India, vide their notification, dated 14th august 2013, has amended the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, enabling the Commission to use VVPAT with electronic voting machines.

- For the first time Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) with Electronic Voting Machines was used for the Noksen Assembly seat in Tuensang district of Nagaland in September, 2013.
- In a ruling in October 2013, the Supreme Court (SC), in the case of Subramanian Swamy vs Election Commission of India (ECI), has held that VVPAT (Vote Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) is “indispensable for free and fair elections” and thus, directed the ECI to equip Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with VVPAT systems to “ensure accuracy of the VVPAT system”.
- The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to introduce a paper trail in EVMs, in a phased manner, for the next general elections in 2014, saying it will ensure free and fair polls. The apex court also directed the Centre to provide financial assistance for introducing Vote Verifier Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system.
- In pursuance of the Supreme Court order, the Election Commission ordered VVPAT systems to be used in the New Delhi assembly for the upcoming assembly elections. The pilot project was launched across 186 polling stations that will cater to 1,18,596 registered voters.
- The Election Commission also instructed the Mizoram election department to use Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail System (VVPAT) system in 10 Assembly constituencies during recently held elections to the 40-member state legislature. VVPAT was also introduced in one constituency each in Delhi (as mentioned above), Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

The Commission will need about 14 lakh VVPAT machines to introduce the system in all 543 Lok Sabha constituencies during forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. However, the Commission is apprehensive that so many machines can be produced and testing them in such a short duration of time. The Commission feels that covering all Parliamentary constituencies may not be possible before 2019 General Elections. The Commission has stated that approximately 1500 crore Rupees would be required for procuring VVPAT and installing it at all polling booths across the country.

(Source: Inputs from
PIB Election Cell Team)