

## Lok Sabha passes Bill to allow NRIs to vote by proxy.

*New Delhi:* After a short discussion on Thursday, the Lok Sabha passed a bill to amend the Representation of the People Act to allow non-resident Indians (NRI) to vote in elections through a proxy.

Even though several members of the Opposition raised concerns about how the proxy voting could be misused, Union Minister for Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad asked the MPs to trust the judgment of the NRIs and moved the motion to pass the Bill.

Introducing the Bill earlier, Prasad said that many NRIs had "complained" that they were "unable" to vote in elections, and thus the government had decided to allow proxy voting for them.

Several members of the Opposition voiced their concern that the proxy chosen by an NRI would vote as per the NRI's choice. AIADMK leader R Gopalakrishnana asked, "What is the guarantee that the proxy will vote for the candidate" chosen by the NRI?

Anandrao Adsul of Shiv Sena also asked that since the Constitution only allows one vote to every person, how will the proxy get a chance to vote again, and for how many NRIs will a single proxy will be able to vote.

Adsul asked, "Kitne ink-mark, kitna ungli ke upar?" evoking the picture of the finger of a voter being inked after she has cast her vote.

Some members wondered if the proxy voting will be against the confidentiality of the voting process. Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo of BJD said it was not a "simple" amendment, as Prasad had commented while introducing the Bill, but "goes to the basic foundation of the democracy and Constitution". He asked how the Election Commission will ensure accurate registration of voters.

He also stated that PM Narendra Modi has been conducting large rallies across countries with NRIs in the audience at the cost of the government money, and smaller parties will not be able to use government machinery in the same manner, thus distorting the level playing field.

Responding, Prasad asked the members to trust NRIs and not feel that they would be "lured" to "sell" their votes. "Let us say whatever, but let us not deride the contribution" of the NRIs, he said. He added that all the concerns raised by the members can be addressed while framing the rules. **ENS**