6.1 Communication Plan
Two comprehensive Communication Exercises / Poll Dry Runs were carried out

There are 386 Polling Stations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Out of these, 167 were identified as "accessible" and the balance 219 as "difficult to reach". The Polling Stations in the latter category are in remote areas such as inside dense forests without motorable roads, on islands where it takes up to one day to reach by boat from the closest hub, etc.

The coordinates (latitude and longitude) of the Polling Stations, were mapped in the ECI Portal using the mobile application provided by the Election Commission.

However, the Election Commission informed that, as per the latitude and longitude coordinates given by this Administration, quite a few polling stations were appearing on the map of the Portal/Google map, as "in the sea". It therefore became necessary to carry out a physical inspection of all the polling stations and to recheck the coordinates. However, the same data again emerged. Thinking out of the box, it was decided to adopt a different strategy. All the polling stations were identified on Google Earth and coordinates recorded from there. This was because the Google Earth Coordinates are more sensitive than the GPS recorders and mobile application which was being used.

In case of heavy forest cover, the roofs of the buildings were marked so that they could be identified. This helped to provide sensitive data on coordinates of polling stations and especially those which are close to the sea.

A) Comprehensive Coordination with BSNL

The BSNL is the only major service provider in this UT. There are a few private ones but they are only in and around Port Blair and very few other places. However, BSNL is also providing very meagre services and the quality is average to poor. In fact almost all transactions are in cash because Credit Card machines cannot run with the limited bandwidth. Even in the best of times this is a very difficult scenario but the implications for elections were very serious particularly in view of the emphasis the Commission has laid on regular and hassle free communication.

A detailed inspection of all polling stations was again carried out with the BSNL and a chart prepared indicating the following:

1. Name, address of the polling station
2. Whether, it has a landline phone or not
3. Whether, there is mobile connectivity there or not
4. The closest landline phone its location and number

The ultimate goal was to ensure that all Polling Stations throughout the Islands have connectivity through one or more options, given below:

S N	Connectivity Option	Implementing/Responsible Agencies
1.	Mobile phone	• BSNL
2.	Landline phone	• BSNL
3.	WLL	• BSNL
4.	Internet	• BSNL, NIC, DeitY
5.	Satellite phone	• DoT • Ministry of Home Affairs
6.	VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol)	• UT Administration IT Department
7.	VHF Set	• UT Administration Police Department
8.	HF Set	• UT Administration Police Department and other Departments which own this.

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This information was shared with the Police. As indicated in the table above it was ensured that at least one phone of communication tool should be available at every polling station.

The BSNL worked tirelessly under the Chief General Manager to improve the quality of the existing services and to restore services where they may have broken down. The Election Office tied up the movement of the BSNL Engineers with the UT department of Civil Aviation so that special helicopters sorties were carried out to remote areas to facilitate urgent repairs by the BSNL.

The BSNL also suggested that WLL phones could also work in certain non-covered areas. The DEO, North and Middle Andamans found that this would be effective in his district and therefore procured the same.

The major credit for ensuring that no polling station was uncovered goes to the Andaman and Nicobar Police. They put every wireless system that they had, static and mobile, into the election machinery and trained their staff and sent them to every part of these islands to ensure 100 percent connectivity.

It was for the first time that every single part of this Territory was accessible at a given time. The CEO functioned from the Control Room of the Disaster Management Centre during the last 10 days leading upto the Poll to monitor this activity. The DEOs similarly moved to their Disaster Management Control Rooms also to ensure the implementation of the Communication Plan in their districts.

Poll Dry Run on 3rd April 2014

In order to ensure that all the worst case scenarios were considered and backup plans ready, a Dry Run of the elections was held exactly one week before the date of Poll that is on 3rd April 2014. On this date all the officers were where they were expected to be on the date of poll i.e 10th April 2014. (with the exception of the polling station personnel). Thus, all the BLOs were outside their respective polling stations, the Sector Officers moved amongst the polling stations in exactly the same way as they would on Poll day, all the senior officers such CEO and RO, DEOs were in their respective Control Rooms as were the Nodal Officer Police, SP Elections and the district SPs.

Since all the wireless units were on the same frequency, it was necessary to ensure that the information required was conveyed crisply and lucidly and that there was no chatter. Extensive directions were therefore issued on the exact action that the Police, the BLOs Sector Officers and others would need to do to collect information and the time for the same was prescribed.

The information communicated through the Police VHF in case of all 386 Polling Stations were

Arrival of all parties at Polling Stations	as per actual time from 9th April 2014
All present and OK on 10th April 2014	5.30 a.m.
Completion of Mock Poll and Certification	6.30 a.m.
Start of poll	7.00 a.m.
OK Report	11.00 a.m.
OK Report	3.00 p.m
Total votes polled till 5.00 p.m. as under	
Total votes (represented by 'T') Total Male votes (represented by 'M') Total Female votes (represented by 'F')	5.00 p.m
Close of Poll	whenever it is
Safe arrival of Poll Parties at Tehsil HQ	as per actual time.
Any incident report	in real time

Poll Dry Run on 7th April 2014

A second Dry Run was held throughout the Territory at all Polling Stations with all the Officers and the BSNL to check availability of their services. Thanks to the extensive action taken by BSNL, as on 7th April 2017, 330 Polling Stations could be accessed either by landline phone, mobile phone, or WLL with BSNL service. This was indeed a very big improvement from the situation which prevailed 10 days earlier.

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The result of this exercise was that, 56 polling stations were identified where there was no BSNL connectivity at all. These 56 polling stations were:

North & Middle Andaman District	(24 Polling Stations) 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 42, 45, 46, 64, 72, 12, 47, 5, 7, 11, 48, 105, 18 and 19.
South Andaman District	(3 Polling Stations) 255, 256 and 257
Nicobar District	(29 Polling Stations) 343, 345, 347, 350, 351, 352, 357, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 330, 341, 346, 353, 354, 361, 362, 363 and 364.

This issue was discussed with Nodal Officer Police and it was decided that all information regarding this 56 polling stations would be received through the police wireless network only on the Poll day.

Feed forwarding the lessons learnt from the Poll Dry Runs on 3rd and 7th April 2014-06-28

1. It would be possible to communicate with 330 polling stations on Poll day through the BSNL, while the Police network would be required for the balance 56 polling stations.
2. The format for the information required and the time given was successful.
3. It would be necessary to check the data sent by both means, therefore, to avoid duplicity or wrong information of data in some Polling Stations, Election Department developed a Poll Data Slip which was given to all the BLOs in order to take official Poll data from the Presiding Officer and pass it on to the Police Radio Operator (PRO) at the Polling Station. For all purposes the Poll Data Slip was the authentic source of information from the Polling Station.

4. Validation of data: Even though Polling data was received from multiple channels, validation of the data by respective DEOs was inevitable and DEOs of all the Districts sent validated data in the prescribed format to RO to forward it to the CEO for onward transmission to ECI.

5. The RO's Control Room was established with 12 telephone desks with an operator having dedicated landline phone for collection of data from every Tehsil and ward in Port Blair Municipal area as per the area allotted to them.

Following receipt of instructions to give two hourly reports on total votes polled/total male vote/total female vote and to check the number of Election Duty Certificates (EDCs) suitable directions were issued to collect these also from both the police and BSNL service.

B Police Communication Plan (from all Polling Booths on Poll day in A & N Islands)

For the first time in the history of A & N Islands it was decided to establish a fool proof communication on the poll day from all the Polling Booths to obtain time to time situation reports and the figures of voted polled (Total Male, Female) for onwards transmission to RO and the CEO.

In order to achieve the above, the A&N Police Radio Organization planned and worked on the following:-

1. Technical teams detailed District wise for checking the feasibility of communication form the respective Polling Booths, especially from the remote islands/places where no means of communication are available. Upon the recommendation of the technical team, communication equipments, sets were thus identified as priority Polling Booths, the numbers was later increased to 56. In these 56 priority Polling Booths, VHF sets(Static) and HF sets were installed. In addition, a

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Sat Phone was also provided to the Polling booth located at Shompen Hut, the remotest Polling booth in the Great Nicobar Islands.

2. Police personnel were identified from amongst the police staff deployed at all the 386 Polling Booths for handling the communication Sets and they were been given training on VHF communication so that net discipline is maintained. Services of 78 Police radio staff were preferred for communication from far flung area which includes the 56 priority Polling stations. The sector officers and supervisory officers deployed on election arrangements were also provided with static/handheld VHF sets. In addition, the police Radio Officer assisted by 3 Inspectors and 5 Sub-Inspectors, 3 Assistant Sub-inspector and 3 police constables/follower Messengers under the overall supervision of SP (Commn.) were deployed at the Police Control Room to receive and pass on the information about votes polled timely to the District Election Control Room.

3. Necessary arrangements for spare communication equipments and batteries with technical staff were also made with the respective Police radio Stations for assistance in case of detect in the communication equipments.

4. All total 548 communication sets were utilized General Election-2014 for communication on poll day.

5. To test the success of the communication from all the 386 Polling Booths, a full dry run/test was held on 29th March, 2014 and shortcomings and communication preparedness were rectified and streamlined.

6. As a result of the above tests held on 29th & 31st March, 2014, there was no shortcoming in communication on the day of final dry run held on 3rd March, 2014 and communication was made to the satisfaction of the CEO.

7. Besides the distribution of personnel and assets of the A&N Police Radio Organization in all the Polling Booths, formats for communication report were designed and circulated to all the Polling Booths, Sectors officers and supervisory officers for compliance.

8. The system, as set for communication on the day of poll (10/04/2014) proved successfully in the General Election 2014 which has been appreciated by all, including the chief Election Officer, A&N Islands.

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