

Eight Countries Witness Assembly Elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi

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New Delhi: Twenty Four Heads/Representatives of Elections Commissions from 8 countries of the Middle East and Africa have just finished witnessing the Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The delegates included Chief Election Commissioners/ Commissioners from South Sudan, Jordan, Gambia and Guinea Bissau and senior representatives from Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria and Senegal. While the four South Sudan Commissioners witnessed polling in Madhya Pradesh, the delegations from the other countries saw the elections in Delhi, visited two model polling stations and also tried their hand at mock polling through the newly introduced VVPAT machines. The delegations from Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon also witnessed elections in Rajasthan in addition to Delhi.

Before leaving for the respective states, they were given detailed briefings by senior officials of the Election of India on ECI's profile and election machinery, its international cooperation agenda including south-south cooperation and main features of poll preparedness in each state.

These visits have been sponsored and facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). ECI and UNDP have an MoU, and an annual work plan, an important feature of which is to jointly promote exchange of visits and sharing of experiences and skills in the field of Electoral Management with developing countries under ECI's South-South Cooperation.

In their debriefing sessions with ECI, chaired by Mr. V. S. Sampath, Chief Election Commissioner of India, all the delegations paid rich tributes to the meticulous planning for elections and its detailed on-the-ground implementation in the states visited by them. They were particularly impressed with the use of technology in these elections, particularly the use of Electronic Voting Machine and the use (on pilot basis) of the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), which they were able to see and try for themselves. They complimented the efforts made in polling station management, campaign regulation, voter education, logistics in all the places they visited and the model polling stations in the New Delhi constituency.

Many delegates expressed interest in transfer of EVM technology to their countries and also sought ECI's assistance in capacity building of their officials, particularly through the training facilities at India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), which has already conducted over 13 international training programmes and workshops since its inception in June 2011.

Mr. V.S. Sampath, in his address to the delegates, expressed ECI's readiness to share the Commission's expertise and experience with more countries, under UNDP aegis for the 2014 General Elections. He suggested holding of an international workshop for senior election officials to share experiences and discuss improvements in election management strategies.

In view of the great interest shown by delegates in the use of technology, and Electronic Voting Systems in particular, he broached the idea of a International Technology Workshop, which could bring together some European countries which have experimented with different types of Electronic Voting systems and Asian/African countries who are interested in learning about the use of technology in elections. He also reiterated ECI's readiness to share its six-decades of experience

and skills in election management with desirous countries of the South, particularly through capacity-building programmes at IIIDEM.

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