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Neutral observers begin to arrive



ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 28 February, 2008

- Members of an Euro-pean Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) team have arrived in Thimphu to observe and assess the run up to the National Assembly election and the March 24 poll day.

Five experts from the team reached the capital on February 22, and 10 more led by the chief observer of the mission, Mr. Javier Pomés Ruiz, a member of the European Parliament, will be here shortly. Nine of them will be deployed to other parts of the country until poll day.

Deputy chief observer, Luis Martinez-Betanzos, told

Kuensel that the mission provided support to the host countries, which invited them, to hold a standard election.

"We'll assess and monitor the election process, make sure everything is within the constitutional framework and in accordance with regional and international standards," he said.

The EU EOM works independently with the mandate to conduct a comprehensive assessment of electoral process and offers an impartial, balanced and informed analysis of the elections.

It assesses all aspects of the electoral process, including delimitation of constituencies, registration of voters and candidates, training of election staff, voter education, media coverage, campaign and the preparations for election day, as well as the appeals process.

On poll day, observers will visit polling stations to observe opening, voting, counting and the aggregation of results.

The deputy chief observer said assessment will be done in line with human rights aspects in the election process, which includes "right to be elected" and "right to vote".

The mission also includes media analysts who will monitor media coverage during the election using international methodological standards of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Press expert, Andrea Malnati, said that they would monitor the main media in the country, especially the state television, Kuzoo radio, and the three newspapers.

"Quantitative analysis will include details like how much time and space was allocated to both parties and candidates, see if it is balanced, and also check the tone of coverage towards the candidates and quality of news reported," he said.

The media monitoring will inform the EU EOM on the performance of media through regular reports and it would also form part of the overall evaluation of the election process.

Meanwhile, observers from different professional backgrounds from 13 member countries, who will arrive this week, will travel to all regions of the country and come out with an assessment.

The deputy chief observer said that the mission will not make any statement until the election was over and will be doing so within 48 hours after the election.

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"We're here not to interfere with the process but to help through study and observation and make recommendations for future elections," said Luis Martinez-Betanzos.

By Kesang Dema
kesang64@kuensel.com.bt

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