KOLKATA: About 46 foreign delegates are coming down to India from 20 countries to witness the polling process, as the Election Commission of India (ECI) conducts poll for the largest democracy and for that various countries have wanted to send delegates. For the first time, ECI along with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is organizing this trip in India for election officials of different countries. On Wednesday, a team of seven from Namibia went to south Bengaluru to have a talk with the election officials, particularly to watch the security system and how polling officials are posted through a randomization process.

The delegations are from countries like Bhutan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Namibia, Nigeria, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Oman, Kenya and Uganda. The delegates will be mostly taken to those booths where there are Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) in the EVM.

Some of the foreign delegates will also meet with the makers of EVM machines which is mainly produced by Bharat Electronics Limited, Bangalore (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited, Hyderabad (ECIL). The experts will show prototype of VVPAT system and will clarify how the EVMs work.

For Bengal, there will be 14 visitors from Nepal during the third phase of polls in the state on April 30. They will be in Howrah to witness the voting process. They will be able to interact with the polling agents and polling officials as well, when they will be visiting the booths. However, the booths they will be visiting in Howrah are yet to be finalized. But officials said that they are trying to select the safe booths, where the guests will not have to face any awkward experience. Comparatively safe booths where security is tight and those closer to the city areas are the obvious choice of the ECI to showcase their success. So, they will obviously try to keep away from booths where rigging or booth jams might happen.

The delegates will be briefed about how the security is made for the elections and how the arrangements of movements to the remote booths are made. The Nepal officials will also interact with the security officials and the polling officials, to get a first hand experience, said Amit Jyoti Bhattacharyya, assistant chief electoral officer of Bengal. Even the Nepal officers will be interacting with the young voters while visiting several booths in Howrah.

For this election visitor programme organized by ECI and UNDP there were a number of requests from various countries as people are willing to watch the biggest democracy in action, said Dhirendra Ojha, director, ECI. “Scrutinizing the requests the ECI has short listed delegates from 20 countries and they will be taken to four states to witness the voting process. The delegates will be taken in phases to these states.” For the April 17 election destination is Bengaluru, while it is Agra for April 24 and Howrah for April 30 polls. On May 7 the delegates will be taken to Shimla. The delegates will be divided into four groups depending and separate groups will be visiting different cities.

Most of the delegates coming down to India are election commission officials and are coming from countries where the concept of democracy is comparatively new and some countries are in a state of transition to democracy.

Already a seven member team from Namibia has arrived and they went to Bengaluru from Delhi on Tuesday to watch the polling process from Wednesday. They will be shown how the randomization of the polling staff takes place before they are sent to different polling booths. The officials from Namibia are expected to buy EVM machines for their presidential election later this year from India and for that they will also be meeting EVM producers.
Namibian delegates reach Bengaluru to observe polls on Thursday - The Times of India

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