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Security still a concern for observers

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD, May 9: Representatives of Gender Concerns International (GCI), who have come to Pakistan to monitor general elections 2013, were dissatisfied with the government's security measures.

"No authority has given us any assurances about security. Law enforcement agencies have not contacted us to discuss security measures for our volunteers. We have already decided not to cover Balochistan.

"However, I have been considering traveling to Quetta alone, but final decision will be made on May 11," Director GCI and head of Gender Election Monitoring Mission (GEM) Sabra Bano said, while talking to mediapersons in a local hotel on Thursday.

Ms Bano who has been living in Holland for the last 30 years said that although local collaborators had suggested that even local volunteers of GCI should not be sent to sensitive polling stations all over the country, particularly, in Balochistan.

"I might go to Balochistan to monitor a few polling stations. We are hoping that extremists might not target us because we are just monitoring for fairness and have nothing to do with the results," she said.

Accompanied by experts of GCI, Lucyna de Graaf, Magda de Meyer who have monitored previous elections in Libya (2012), Morocco (2011), Tunisia (2011) and Pakistan (2008), Ms. Bano said that they appreciate that the democratic process is underway in Pakistan, a step in the right direction.

"If the general election process is not inclusive of women, it will not bring democracy", she added.

GCI is the only international non-governmental organisation that has been accredited by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in partnership with Aurat Foundation, to monitor female participation in the election.

Ten foreign female experts have arrived in the country to monitor the election, in the collaboration with 50 local female observers in three provinces and the federal capital.

Chief Coordinator GEM Farkhanda Aurangzaib noted that foreign experts would stay in the hotel, while 50 trained domestic observers, from Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad would give them feedback.

The local observers will work in their native areas so cultural sensitivities are observed.

The trainers also elaborated an obser-

vation methodology developed by Gender Concerns International's for election observation and promoting gender inclusive governance throughout the Middle East, North Africa Region and parts of Asia. On Monday, May 13, GEM will issue a preliminary report regarding the electoral process. The final report of the GEM will be issued within the next two months.

In Attock, a two member delegation of European Union (EU)'s observer mission visited the district Police headquarters to discuss provision of security for the EU's observers during their visits to the district to monitor the election process on May 11.

Police sources informed that the two-member EU Election Observation mission at Pakistan led by Alin Dreagen and Brellta Oleksy met with the district Police officer (DPO) Abdul Kadir Qamar.

The delegation was briefed by the officials about the administrative and security measures that have been taken by the district police and civil administration ahead of the polling day.

Particularly, the delegation has been briefed on sensitive polling stations, strength of contesting candidates, voters and polling stations in the district.