

Polls monitoring bodies meet EC and acting IGP

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Polls monitoring bodies during a meeting held with the Election Commission and the Acting Inspector General of Police had relayed concerns regarding the setting up of an efficient and transparent complaints related mechanism, the creation of a level playing field for candidates, and the facilitation of overseas Lankans who wish to exercise their franchise.

The election observers had also proposed that the Commission consider the provision of a separate time frame in the morning of 5 August for groups that are vulnerable in terms of contracting COVID-19 such as the elderly and pregnant women, to exercise their vote at the General/Parliamentary Election, thereby reducing exposure.

The People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) and the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) had been present at the said meeting on 10 June.

Concerning the Election, PAFFREL will deploy a total of over 5,000 local observers

(made up of 3,000 stationary, 1,000 mobile, 1,000 for postal voting, 300 for counting) while approximately 20 international observers from the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) are likely to participate subsequent to undergoing 14 days of quarantine.

On the day of the Poll, CMEV will deploy 2,000 static observers inside polling stations, 100 vehicles manned by 200 observers which will travel from Colombo to selected at risk, vulnerable areas (in terms of geographical isolation, propensity for violence to erupt in the event there are multiple candidates), 200 observers for counting, and in keeping with a policy of inclusiveness, 100 observers who happen to be persons with disabilities. Further, CMEV has, since 8 June, deployed 100 long-term observers, employed for a two months period.

Speaking to Ceylon Today, Executive Director of PAFFREL and Secretary General of ANFREL, Rohana Hettiarachchi said: "The complaints mechanism at the Commission should be quick and transparent in terms of both the receipt of complaints and

addressing such. There should be a mechanism to ensure that there is an equal playing field for candidates. If the airports are entirely opened up by the time of the Poll, then Lankans living overseas who wish to exercise their franchise could come down to do so. During this Election, the Commission, political parties, candidates, law enforcement authorities, the Media, observers and citizens should work collectively and in a flexible manner."

He also added that all observers had signed a pledge that they would adhere to health guidelines and code of conduct, and noted further that action would be taken to remove observers who do not abide by such.

National Coordinator of CMEV, Manjula Gajanayake said they would commence the tracking of electoral expenditure by political parties and candidates, utilising novel methodologies.

When contacted with regard to the deployment of European Union (EU) observers, their numbers and the composition of the team, the Delegation of the EU to Sri Lanka requested time to get back with a reply.