

Election Working Group



Union Parishad (UP) Elections 2011 [Phase-1] EWG Observation Summary

UP Elections in Coastal Regions Ended Well

The Election Working Group (EWG), a national non-partisan citizen's coalition, share a common objective to help in the process of establishing good governance and democratic culture through free and fair elections in Bangladesh. The EWG plans to observe UP Elections in a sample number of Unions in 64 Districts of the country. The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) announced that it would hold elections in two phases, with first phase of elections observed in coastal areas, due to the challenge of organizing elections in those regions during the monsoon season. The second phase of elections would be held over the months of May-July 2011.

The first phase of elections was held mainly in the coastal belt of three Divisions of the country (Khulna, Chittagong and Barisal) from March 29 to April 3, 2011. Five EWG member organizations namely, Coast Trust, Rupantar, Mass-Line Media Center (MMC), Dak Diey Jai (DDJ) and Jagoroni Chakra Foundation observed elections in 194 Unions using mobile observers in teams of five. A total of 960 mobile observers were engaged in monitoring elections in 116 Unions in Barisal Division, 71 Unions in Khulna Division and 7 Unions in Chittagong Division. Elections in two of the Unions, Boro Maheshkhali and Hoanak under Maheshkhali Upazila in Cox's Bazar District, was originally scheduled to be held on April 3, 2011, but was later re-scheduled for April 16, 2011. The then-Chairman of Dhalghata Union filed a case citing problems with the voter list as Rohingyas were allegedly included which created disruption in the entire Maheshkhali Upazila leading to postponement of the election date. Elections in two Unions of Barguna District in Barisal Division under Patharghata Upazila, were postponed to April 23, 2011, due to pre-election clashes between opposing candidate supporter groups. Elections observation findings from these Unions have also been included in the report. The EWG observers' main points of observation included observers' access, presence of polling agents, electoral administration, and voting and security environment at the polling centers.

Based on overall observation by the EWG members in the first phase of elections, except for a few issues noted below, the elections were fair. However, EWG observers were not granted access to a few polling centers to observe vote count by the Presiding Officers. In Par Kumira Government Primary School of Shorulia Union in Satkhira, M Hossain Reg Primary School of Rajapur Union in Jhalakhati, Ramer Katthi High School of Sholak Union in Barisal, Korla Govt Primary School of Amirpur Union in Khulna, Charkomboria Reg Primary School of Char Manika Union in Bhola and 13 centers in Pirojpur, observers were not given access to observe vote count.

The electoral administration was perceived to have done an efficient job in majority of the polling centers. However, there were different forms of influence on voters through elections day campaigning, arrangement of transport for voters and individuals attempting to influence voters at polling centers. Some specific findings are given below:

- Voting booth arrangement was not seen to be satisfactory in Shadi Rupai Mia Orphanage and Gono Para Community Primary School of Kashipur Union in Barisal district, and Baroikaran Forkania Madrasa of Kulkathi Union in Jhalakhati district. The voting booth was in a cramped space and at times two people were seen voting together at the same time which compromised voter's privacy.
- In 30 Alipur Government Primary School of Alipur Union and Kolapota Government Primary School of Tetulia Union in Satkhira, snacks were provided to a few voters by candidate supporters.
- In Otra Union of Uzirpur Upazila of Barisal District, EWG observers noted that the Presiding Officer of Habibpur High School was not performing his duties satisfactorily. Unauthorized individuals were seen to be present at the center and polling agents from only one candidate were present during polling.
- In Nagarbari Govt Primary School of Gaila Union, Babor Khana of Sholak Union, and Babugonj Pilot High School of Rahmatpur Union in Barisal District, election day campaigning was carried out, despite being prohibited. This was also observed in Lautar Government Primary School of Tetulia Union in Satkhira.
- In Gono Para Community Primary School of Kashipur Union, Babugonj Pilot High School of Rahmatpur Union, Bara Kotha Union Degree College of Bara Kotha Union and HM Institute of Bamrail Union in Barisal District, transport was arranged for a few voters.
- It was reported that in Boalia center in Rangasree Union of Bakergonj Upazila in Barisal District, one of the candidates Mr Awal Hawlader, requested re-count of votes. Re-count increased the number of votes in his favor by 100. Thereafter, he requested re-count in his entire election area but there was no initiative taken in this regard to accommodate his request.

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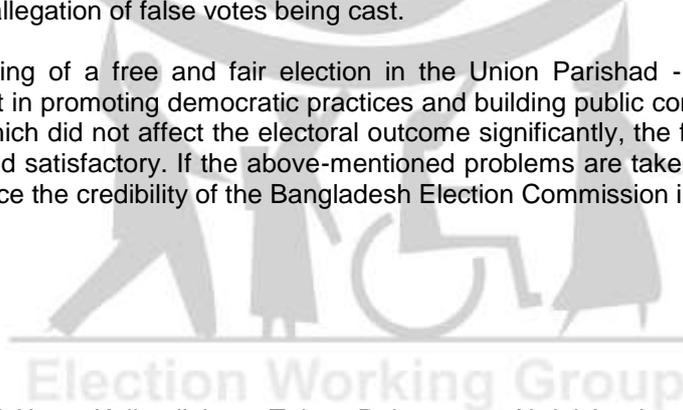


- In Dacope Thana Government Primary School of Dacope Union in Khulna District, transport was arranged for elderly and persons with disability.

Performance of law enforcement agencies, such as Police, BGB and Ansar were in general seen to be satisfactory, but security issues did arise at a few centers. Incidents such as casting of false votes, snatching of ballot boxes and clash between party supporters were seen at centers in Jhalakhati, Bhola and Patuakhali districts. Some specific details are as follows:

- In Ulania Secondary School of Ratandi Taltoli Union in Golachipa Upzaila of Patuakhali district, five persons were reported to be taken into police custody for casting false votes.
- In Panpatti Union of Golachipa Upazila, there was clash outside the polling center between party supporters because there was delay in counting of votes after the poll.
- Miscreants attempted to snatch ballot boxes in M Hossain Reg. Primary School of Rajapur Upazila of Jhalakhati District, but law enforcement agents rescued the ballot box from them.
- In Sambolkathi Government Primary School of Bashanda Union in Jhalakhati Sadar, observers noted chaos outside the polling center but it was soon under control by law enforcement agents.
- In 24 No. Veronbaria Government Primary School of Ranapasha Union of Nalchchiti Upazila in Jhalakhati District, there was conflict between rival party supporters over forced casting of votes in favor of one candidate. One person was injured during the clash.
- At two centers (Kalikirti Government Primary School and West Shibpur Registered Primary School) in Shibpur Union of Bhola Sadar, there were reports of clash between opposing groups over casting of false votes. Polling was stalled in Dokkhin Ratanpur Government Primary School in Shibpur Union due to agitation between two groups. Similar incident occurred at Dasherhat Vobani Reg. Primary School in Chandpur Union of Bhola District.
- In Khairhat Government Primary School of Dokkhin Joynagar Union in Bhola District, there was quarrel between contesting candidates agents. At another center (West Joynagar Reg. Primary School), there were reports of chase and counter chase among agents of contesting candidates.
- At two centers (2 no. Government Primary School and Lalmohon Government Primary School) in Lalmohon Sadar in Bhola District, there was allegation of false votes being cast.

The EWG believes that holding of a free and fair election in the Union Parishad - the lowest tier of elected local government - will be important in promoting democratic practices and building public confidence in the electoral process. Despite a few irregularities which did not affect the electoral outcome significantly, the first phase of the UP Elections in the coastal areas was free and satisfactory. If the above-mentioned problems are taken care of in the second phase of the UP Elections, it will enhance the credibility of the Bangladesh Election Commission in holding free and fair elections.



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