



March 2, 2014

Election Working Group

Preliminary Statement on the Second Phase of Upazila Elections

Held on February 27, 2014

INTRODUCTION & SCOPE OF OBSERVATION

The Election Working Group (EWG) is a non-partisan network of 29 leading civil society organizations in Bangladesh that was formed in 2006 with the shared goal of enhancing transparency and accountability of elections and other democratic processes. EWG is governed by a strict code of conduct to carry out comprehensive election observation throughout the country. Since its establishment, EWG has observed elections at the national, City Corporation and local levels, as well as conducting advocacy activities on election-related issues. As part of its core mandate, EWG has planned to observe all phases of the 4th Upazila Elections in 2014.

In order to observe the second phase of the Upazila Elections held on February 27th, EWG deployed 1,245 observers on election day in 41 of the 115 upazilas where polls were being held. These upazilas were chosen from all 7 administrative Divisions, and polling stations within each upazila were selected using a random sampling technique from the complete list of polling stations prepared and gazetted by the Election Commission Bangladesh (ECB). All observers received a full day's training, with many observers having previous experience in observation activities. EWG observation activities were comprehensive covering: (i) preparation and opening of the polling stations; (ii) voting operations and procedures; (iii) closing and counting; and (iv) the broader environment inside the polling stations.

FINDINGS

EWG found efficient and professional polling operations undertaken in a majority of the polling stations, however sporadic cases of violence, intimidation and claimed cases of fraud disrupted activities in a sizeable number of locations. The mean average voter turnout figure in polling stations observed was 63.1%.

Opening of polling stations

EWG observed a high level of preparedness on election day with 97% of polling stations equipped with the necessary materials, 95.9% found ready for voting by 7:30am, and security forces deployed at all polling stations. Proper processes were followed in almost all stations with the demonstration of

empty ballot boxes and the fixing of security locks on the ballot boxes. Voting on average began within five minutes of the official start time of 8am, with the latest booth recording an opening time of 8:30am. The security situation at the opening of polls was considered good at 98.7% of observed stations.

Voting operations

EWG observers found voting operations were carried out proficiently in the majority of stations, with 71.1% of polling personnel carrying out their work in a knowledgeable manner. Procedures put in place to avoid multiple voting by citizens were found to be used effectively with indelible ink applied in a visible way in 84% of stations.

A sizeable number of disruptions to the voting process were reported, with 131 incidences of violence in 19 Upazilas and 141 cases of voter intimidation in 18 Upazilas reported. EWG observers reported 90 instances in 16 Upazilas where violations of campaign law had taken place, and 27 cases in 13 Upazilas where arrests were made within the polling station. Some citizens ability to vote was either hindered or prevented with 71 reported cases of polling stations closing temporarily or early.

Female voters were found on average to have to queue for 25% longer than male voters, while female polling personal were only found to be present in 46.3% of female polling booths.

Closing and counting

At the closing of polls, EWG observers found significant queuing still occurring at many stations, with 39 voters on average waiting to cast their vote. However in only 3.8% of cases were queuing voters disallowed to cast their vote after the official closing time, contravening electoral law.

The counting of votes was found to be carried out in a largely peaceful and professional manner. Protests or objections by candidate agents were recorded in 8.5% of stations, and the hanging of poll results as required by law was undertaken in 89.8% of stations.

Md. Abdul Alim

Director

**THIS IS A PRELIMINARY STATEMENT. A FULL REPORT DETAILING OBSERVATION
ACTIVITIES WILL BE PROVIDED AT A LATER DATE.**