



June 17, 2014

Election Working Group

Press Release

on

Barisal By-election

SCOPE OF OBSERVATION

To observe the Parliamentary by-election in Barisal-5 constituency held on June 15, 2014 the Election Working Group (EWG) deployed 75 observers in 75 polling stations out of 159 stations. Within the each constituency, the locations of observers in polling stations were assigned using a random sampling technique from the complete list of polling stations prepared and gazetted by the Election Commission Bangladesh (ECB), with having a statistically significant number of observers deployed. All observers received a full day's training with many of them having previous experience in observation activities. EWG's Election Day observation activities were comprehensive, covering: (i) preparation and opening of the polling stations; (ii) voting operations and procedures; (iii) closing and counting; and (iv) voting environment inside the polling stations.

FINDINGS

EWG found Election Day to be mostly peaceful with no incidence of violence. However, a huge number of suspected fraud cases were recorded having no obstruction from polling personnel and security forces. There was no enthusiasm among the voters. In general, voting was apparently undertaken in an efficient and professional manner, with election officials adequately trained; but suspected fraud compromised the integrity of voting in 91% of the observed polling stations. The mean average voter turnout in the polling stations observed was 53.7%. However, EWG holds concerns that this figure does not reflect actual turnout due to incidences of ballot stuffing.

Opening of polling stations

EWG observed a high level of preparedness on the Election Day with almost all polling stations equipped with the necessary materials (99%) and found ready for voting at 8.00 am (83%). Sufficient security forces were deployed in almost all (99%) the observed polling stations. Proper processes were followed in most of the (94%) stations with the demonstration of empty ballot boxes and the fixing of security locks on the boxes. At the opening of the polls, there was moderate queuing of voters with 1-20 voters waiting in 30% of stations and 6% recording a queue of more than 20 voters.

ABOUT EWG

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 been observing each phase of the 2014 Upazila Elections as well as parliamentary by-elections.

Voting operations & violations

EWG observers found that the officials were carrying out voting operations proficiently in majority of the stations, with 94% of polling personnel carrying out their work in a knowledgeable manner. The majority of stations had been laid out adequately to aid efficient voting (94%). However, EWG did receive few reports of accessibility challenges for disabled voters due to the station location and setup. Female polling personnel were found to be present in 71% of female polling booths. Indelible ink pens were considered to have been used effectively in 67% of polling stations.

EWG quite commonly observed various types of electoral violence and polling violations which are listed in the table below. It is important to note that this time huge number of suspected fraud and 5 cases of violation of campaign law were recorded in the polling stations observed.

Violations	No. of Reports
Violent incident within station	0
Intimidation of voters	0
Suspected fraud*	85
Violation of campaign law**	5
Citizen denied right to vote by other actor	0
Polling station declared closed	0
Polling agents removed from station	0
Arrest within station	0
EWG observer not allowed to observe counting procedure	0

* 85 incidents of ballot stuffing took place and each of the incident was in multiple number.

** Campaign on election day is prohibited, but supporters of candidates conducted campaign on election day.

To further understand the nature of the suspected fraud and low voter turnout, EWG has documented several reported cases below. Where possible, the EWG secretariat sought confirmation of the reported fraud by speaking with either an attending electoral official, district electoral official or other attending representatives.

- In Ward no. 12, 50-60 people entered into all the polling booths of a polling station, seized about 1,200-1,300 ballot papers, stamped them and put into the ballot boxes. The law enforcement personnel present did not take any action against the perpetrators.
- In a polling station in Ward no. 1, ballot stuffing was perpetrated three times; at around 10 am a group of people entered into the station, stamped about 100 ballot papers and put those into the ballot boxes. Similar incidents were observed at 1 pm and at 3 pm. In this polling station, the EWG observer counted the number of voters visited the polling station and counted number was 150; but the voter turnout as declared by the Presiding Officer was 1,675.

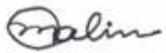
- In a polling station in Ward no 6, a group of 8-10 female supporters of a candidate stayed whole day. They did the ballot stuffing as well as stood in the queue when observers or officials came to visit the polling station.

Counting & Closing

94% polling stations were closed at 4.00 pm – the official closing time and none of the polling stations observed was closed denying the voters to exercise their voting rights. The counting and closing procedures were found to be carried out adequately in most of the stations (97%). The environment was also found peaceful during counting although protests or objections by candidate agents were recorded in 6% of stations, and the hanging of poll results as required by law was not undertaken in 16% of stations.

OBSERVER INCIDENTS

All 75 EWG observers were allowed to enter into the polling stations by the Presiding Officers, and none of them was ousted by the polling personnel or local authorities. Moreover, none of the observers was prevented from observing the counting of votes. EWG is grateful to the Election Commission for ensuring the issuance of all requested observer accreditation cards.



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