



June 28, 2014

Election Working Group

Preliminary Statement

Parliamentary By-election in Narayanganj-5 Constituency

SCOPE OF OBSERVATION

To observe the Parliamentary by-election in Narayanganj-5 constituency held on June 26, 2014 the Election Working Group (EWG) deployed 60 observers in 60 polling stations out of 141 stations. Within this 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 the 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 the Election Day to be mostly peaceful with no incident of violence. However, a huge number of suspected fraud cases were recorded. 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 30% of the observed polling stations. The mean average voter turnout in the observed stations was 43.5%. 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 all polling stations equipped with the necessary materials (100%) and almost all of them (92%) were found ready for voting at 8.00 am. Sufficient security forces were deployed in all (100%) the observed stations. Proper processes were also followed in all the (100%) 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 53% of stations and 3% recording a queue of more than 40 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 the Parliamentary elections.

Voting operations and violations

EWG observers found that the officials were carrying out voting operations proficiently in majority of the stations, with 92% of polling personnel carrying out their work in a knowledgeable manner. Majority of stations had been laid out adequately to aid efficient voting (95%). However, EWG did receive a few reports of accessibility challenges for voters with disability due to the station location and setup. Female polling personnel were found to be present in 85% of female polling booths. Indelible ink pens were considered to have been used effectively in 72% of the 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 a huge number of suspected fraud, 3 cases of intimidation and 3 cases of violation of campaign law were recorded in the observed polling stations.

Violations	No. of Reports
Violent incident within station	0
Intimidation of voters	3
Suspected fraud*	18
Violation of campaign law**	3
Citizens denied right to vote by other actors	0
Polling stations declared closed	0
Polling agents removed from station	0
Arrest within station	0
EWG observer not allowed to observe counting procedure	8

* 17 incidents of ballot stuffing took place and each of the incidents was in multiple numbers.

** Campaign on the 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 number 11, a group of people entered into a polling station, seized 8-10 ballot papers, stamped them and put into the ballot box. The law enforcement agency and polling personnel present did not take any action against the perpetrators. Even the polling agents of the opponent candidates kept quiet during this ballot stuffing.
- In a polling station in Alirtek area, a group of 50-60 people entered into a polling station, stayed there for about 2 hours and did ballot stuffing. The Presiding Officer kept quiet as he was intimidated.
- In some polling stations in Ward number 13, illegal entry of people was observed after 2 pm; estimated voter turnout in these polling stations was 10%, but after 2.30 pm it became roughly 40%. In a polling station in Ward number 15, total number of voters was 632. Up to 3 pm 290 votes were casted. The EWG observer was ousted at 3 pm and he was allowed to enter again at 3.30 pm. In this half an hour, 278 more votes were casted.
- In Dhamgar area, 7-8 people entered into a polling station and did huge ballot stuffing.

Counting and Closing

95% polling stations were closed at 4.00 pm – the official closing time. However, in 5% of polling stations it was observed that voters who reached the stations at or just before 4.00 pm were stopped from exercising their right to vote. The counting and closing procedures were found to be carried out adequately in most of the stations (81%). The environment was also found peaceful during counting although protests or objections by candidate agents were recorded in 14% of the stations, and the hanging of poll results as required by law was not undertaken in 14% of the stations.

OBSERVER INCIDENTS

All 60 EWG observers were allowed to enter into the polling stations by the Presiding Officers, while only one EWG observer was ousted by the polling personnel or local authorities. Moreover, eight observers were prevented from observing the counting of votes; one of them was not allowed to see counting as local leaders of a political party ordered the Presiding Officer to do so.

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