



April 1, 2017

Election Working Group Preliminary Statement on Comilla City Corporation Election Held on March 30, 2017

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Based on its Election Day observation, the Election Working Group (EWG) found the March 30, 2017, Comilla City Corporation Election to be generally without major incident, though there were scattered incidents of violence and attempts of ballot stuffing in the afternoon. In general, polling officials were neutral, voting was undertaken in an efficient and professional manner, and voters were able to cast their votes in an orderly manner. Voter turnout was 62.7% as observed by EWG. Despite a small number of observed incidents of malpractice, irregularities, and violence, EWG evaluates the Comilla City Corporation Election as a good start for the 12th Election Commission led by KM Nurul Huda.

Methodology

Out of 103 polling stations in Comilla City Corporation, EWG observed 38 polling stations (36.9%) covering 26 wards; these polling stations were selected using a random sampling technique from the complete list of polling stations prepared and gazetted by the Election Commission. Prior to Election Day, all EWG observers, even those with previous observation experience, received one full day of training. 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.

Poll opening

EWG found that all polling stations observed were equipped with all necessary equipment and opened on time. In all observed polling stations, ballot boxes were opened in front of polling agents and observers to demonstrate that the boxes were empty and, in 94% of polling stations observed, voters were seen standing in long queues to cast their vote, with queues of longer than 40 voters in 59% polling stations. During opening, EWG observers found agents from Awami League mayoral candidates in 97.4% of observed polling stations, and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) agents in 89.5% of observed polling stations.

Voting operations

In most of the polling stations observed, voting took place peacefully in the morning. In all polling stations observed, polling agents from both the major party candidates were present during polling. Secrecy of voting was maintained in all the polling stations observed. Observers found that special attention was given to certain categories of voters, such as the aged, pregnant women, visually impaired, and other persons with disabilities, EWG observers assessed that 79% of observed polling stations were accessible to persons with disabilities. Polling officials were found efficient in conducting

polling in 95% of observed polling stations. The voter turnout as observed by EWG throughout the day was as follows:

10.00 am	01.00 pm	3.00 pm	4.00 pm
22%	51%	60%	62.7%

Peaceful morning, trifling violations in the afternoon

In most of the polling stations observed, voting took place without significant incident in the morning; however, in 15.8% of observed polling stations, EWG observers witnessed poll violations in the afternoon. Although in some polling stations, EWG observers saw unidentified individuals trying to do ballot stuffing, most observed attempts failed due to the steps taken by the election officials and law enforcement. EWG observed 12 incidents of violations in 6 polling stations mostly in the afternoon:

Violations	No. of reports
Voters provided transport by candidate	1
Violence inside polling center	1
Violence outside polling center	4
Incidents of arrest	3
Polling center declared closed	2
Closed polling center re-opened	1

Closing and counting

Voting in all the polling stations observed ended at 4 pm, the official closing time. Counting started almost immediately after voting ended; however, eight EWG observers were not allowed into the counting rooms. In 97% of polling stations in which EWG observed counting, presiding officers ensured the presence of polling agents and observers, and EWG found no unauthorized persons present in the counting rooms. All observers witnessed the security seals were fixed with the ballot boxes properly. No incidence of violence and election irregularities was observed during counting. The result is any polling station observed was not postponed and only one complaint was launched by a polling agent during counting.

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ABOUT THE ELECTION WORKING GROUP

The Election Working Group (EWG) is a non-partisan network of 28 leading civil society organizations in Bangladesh that was formed in 2006 with the shared goal of enhancing the transparency and accountability of elections and other democratic processes in Bangladesh. EWG is governed by a strict code of conduct to carry out neutral, comprehensive election observation throughout the country. This includes a scientific methodology of randomly sampling polling stations when deploying observers, and comprehensive training for all observers. Since its establishment, EWG has observed elections at the national, city corporation, and local levels, as well as conducting advocacy for further electoral reforms.