

Report on Habiganj-1 and Brahmanbaria-3 By Election Observation

8 February 2011



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Democracywatch would like to acknowledge and extend special thanks to all those who participated in and made the observation of the by-elections possible. First, we are profoundly grateful to The Asia Foundation (TAF) who gave us the financial support necessary to carry out the by-elections observation activities. We are also profoundly grateful to the Election Commission who has given permission to observe these Elections on mobile basis.

It is worth mentioning that the funding of TAF to remain was a great support for us in observing the by-elections. Without the generous funding from them, the observation exercise would not have taken place.

Second, we are very grateful to our Board Members and Staff, for their continued support and guidance, and for participating in the observation exercise. We also appreciate the role played by Election Working Group Secretariat in planning and implementing the observation exercise. The Secretariat effectively participated in and managed the entire observation exercise.

Third, we acknowledge all our Observers for their dedication and commitment towards the observation exercise. We deeply appreciate our observers for their diligence, commitment, and hard work in monitoring and observing the pre-election environment; and for the identification, recruitment, and mobilization of the observers in their respective Constituencies. Their commitment and hard work of the Observers was instrumental in ensuring an efficient and reliable observation and recording of electoral data on polling day. The data and information collected and compiled by the Constituency Coordinators has significantly supported the compilation of this report.

Finally, we wish to thank the Bangladesh Election Commission for accrediting Democracywatch to observe the by-elections and for the support and cooperation we received during the exercise. We particularly wish to thank Democracywatch Election Team for their hard work, support and cooperation during the by-elections.

Taleya Rehman
Executive Director
Democracywatch

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracywatch is a Non-Governmental Organization providing non-partisan leadership in the democratization and governance process in Bangladesh through programmes in the Electoral Process, Civic/Voter Education, Research and Dissemination, and provision of technical assistance and support. Democracywatch focuses on provision of non-partisan and gender balanced information and skills to empower citizens especially those from the marginalized areas including women and the youth, to enable them to participate effectively and efficiently in governance and democratic processes and to contribute towards the creation of positive political behavior and culture.

Thus, as part of its core objectives, Democracywatch set out to monitor and observe the two by-elections in Brahmanbaria-3 and Habiganj-1 Constituencies in Bangladesh.

In order to undertake the observation, Democracywatch recruited and deployed thirty three observers in two constituencies. The Constituency Observers were trained and deployed on 25 January, 2011 to monitor, observe and report on the Election Day environment and electoral process. The reports from the Constituency Monitors informed the preparation of a pre-election assessment report, which was shared with stakeholders and partners involved in the electoral process during briefing sessions before the Election Day. The Constituency Coordinators were also tasked with the responsibility of mobilizing and recruiting, based on gender responsive selection criteria, Ten observers from the two Constituencies. Training of the Poll Observers covered key thematic areas in elections observation including what to look for on the polling day, elections code of conduct, electoral malpractices, rights of the observer, and the election observation tool. With a day to the actual polling day, the Observers were deployed in 33 polling stations in the two Constituencies.

During the by-elections, apart from the EWG checklist, Democracywatch set up and utilized a Parallel Votes (Results) Tabulation (PVT) Method by the experience and lessons learnt during the 2008 general elections particularly with regard to the difficulties in getting authentic alternative results. The Observers sent the results through a text message to Democracywatch office for analysis and posting to the Democracywatch information cell. By mid night of the Election Day we had received results from all the 33 polling stations in Brahmanbaria-3 and Habiganj-1 Constituencies. We have sent an interim report to Media in the afternoon on the Election Day. A total of five newspapers published this report with high importance.

Summery Findings

Having participated in the by-elections as monitors and observers, Democracywatch would like to state that the by-election results were in general, a reflection of the voters' wishes in the two Constituencies of Brahamnabaria-3 and Habiganj-1. The general voters in Bramanbaria and Habiganj Constituencies had a fair opportunity to express their will through the ballot, which they did in a peaceful environment. According to our observers, The Election Commission prepared very well for the by-elections and managed and administered them well and in a credible manner. These statements are based on eyewitness accounts and evidence submitted to Democracywatch by its Observers, Observers who were detailed in all the 33 (Habiganj-1-16 centers, Brahamnabaria-17 Centers) polling stations and polling streams in the two Constituencies deployed. The following are the key findings based on the analysis of our observations reports:

- The Bangladesh Election Commission management to prepare two by-elections was found to be fairly good. But defective election materials (i.e. indelible ink) made the raised concerned among the observers.
- Low presence of the voters made the Election Environment dull in two constituencies.
- 85% of the polling stations had all the necessary elections materials fully functioning for purposes of voting and counting processes which means that only a small proportion (15%) of the polling stations were reported as having faulty election materials such as low quality of indelible ink, which had some negative impact on voting process.
- Majority (99%) of the polling stations opened on time as required i.e. eight o'clock in the morning.
- In most (90%) of the polling stations in both Constituencies had some polling agents present when voting commenced at 8.00 am. Some of the polling agents did not show up during the entire voting and counting processes while some arrived very late mostly between 10:00 am and 12.00 pm.
- Voting procedures in 95% of the polling stations were very well followed by the election officials.
- Majority (95%) of the polling stations in both Constituencies conducted the by-elections in a very transparent manner.
- In most of the cases Election Officials performed much better in terms of timelines, efficiency and effectiveness in discharging their roles.
- According to observers the voter turnout was about 65%

Though the election was held in a peaceful manner in Habiganj-1 but dissimilarity between the voter lists provided by the District Election Office and the voter slips of the voters present at the center named Amtoli Regi: Primary School at 8.15 AM made 30/40 voters waiting outside of the center worried. Many voters working in the tea gardens expressed their doubt to votes though they were given leave for the poll. At Kamaichhara Tea Garden Primary School only 6% votes were cast at 9 AM. Beside this, at 9.30 AM 10% at Chakrampur Govt. Primary School, at 10 AM 20% at Mirpur Govt. Primary School, at 11.10 AM 20% at Kalibari Govt. Primary School, at 11.25 AM only 10% at Chalitlatla Madrasa, At 12 PM 25% at Kalyanpur Govt. Primary School and at 1 PM 30% vote were cast at Gopalpur Bazaar Govt. Primary School, said the Presiding Officers. Only four or five voters were seen in many observed centers even in the late hours. The election officers thought that it might for cold weather and for the boro season.

The voters and the Election Officers of every center at Habiganj-1 complained that the election materials especially the stamp pad, seal and the indelible ink lacked quality though they were sufficient in quantity, for this reason voters and election officials faced difficulties in many centers. In most of the centers lacked enough light as the secret polling booth were made with the school benches. Again in some centers the windows had to be opened for this. At about 12.15 an argument with chase and counter chase between Awami League and BNP supporters took place at Muraura Govt. Primary School. The center became almost voter less at this time though the administration and law enforcers immediately took control.



Voters queue at a Polling center at Habiganj

At Brahmanbaria-3 withdrawal of the BNP agent at Basudev High School and Anjuman Ara School and College brought out a dispute between The Awami League and BNP agents. At one time the polling agents of BNP went away from those two polling centers. In addition, BNP agents were not found in one or two observed centers. The voters complained against the low indelible ink at almost every polling center. However the number of voters was up to the expectation in Brahmanbaria-3 in the morning. The performances of law enforcing agencies were satisfactory.



Polling center at Brahmanbaria

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings we recommend the following:

Strengthening of the Bangladesh Election Commission in order to re-build public confidence: The by-elections were conducted in a peaceful manner even though EC managed and administered the by-elections in an efficient manner. But public confidence on their activities was not that high. We therefore, appeal to the Election Commission to involve all stakeholders to organize a follow up meeting to identify problems and lacking to ensure neutral and credible election.

Exclusive and effective Training for Presiding Officer/Assistant Presiding Officer/Polling Officer: Some of the Election Officials requested for exclusive training for them for better management of the polling centers.

Adequate and quality election materials:

The voters and the Election Officers of every center at Habiganj-1 complained that the election materials especially the stamp pad, seal and the indelible ink lacked quality though they were sufficient in quantity, for this reason voters and election officials faced difficulties in many centers. So this is the high time to think about it.

(d) Adequate space for Polling Stations: During our observation, we found out that some Polling Stations were too small to allow free movement of voters as they came in and left after voting also, they could not accommodate all the polling agents and officials. We therefore recommend that the BEC should identify and relocate the smaller Polling Stations to spacious places. We recommend that an audit of existing Polling Stations be conducted to assess their suitability and accessibility for voting. This will provide an opportunity to relocate and create new Polling Stations.

(e) Civic/Voter Education: Our observations revealed that voter education is still wanting especially at the grassroots level. This is evidenced by the fact that a substantive number of voters especially women were standing at Habiganj in front of the polling station. This meant that a substantive number of voters do not know where they will cast vote. Also, there is a need to design a special civic/voter education programme for the old and the illiterate as a high number of them who were assisted to vote. Therefore there is a need to design strategic and innovative civic/voter education programmes to mitigate the increasing level of voter apathy and disenchantment in the country.

(f) Gender Mainstreaming: we recommend that EC should deliberately engender its training and recruitment policy to enable training and recruitment of more gender balanced election officials. Our statistics showed male dominated in the recruitment of all positions thus the Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers etc.

Annex-1

Election Results

Election Result of Habiganj- 1				
SL	Name of the Candidate	Name Of Party	Symbol	Vote
1	Shaikh Shujat Mia	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	81,3302
2	Dr. Md. Musfik Hossain Chpwdhuary	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	80,0453
3	Abdul Monim Choudhury	Jatiya Party (E)	Plough	22,220
Election Result of Brahmanbaria- 3				
SL	Name of the Candidate	Name Of Party	Symbol	Vote
1	Rabiul Alam Md. Obaidur Muktadir Rahman	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	125,141
2	Md. Kaled Hossain Mahmu	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	84,631
3	Md. Rezaul Islam Bhuyain	Jatiya Party (E)	Plough	608

Annex-2

Fact Sheet Brahmanbaria-3 by-Election-2011

Date of By-Election	: 27 January 2011
Last date of submission of nomination paper	: 2 January 2011
Scrutiny date of Nomination paper	: 4 January 2011
Last date of withdrawal	: 11 January 2011
Number of Upazila	: 1 (Sadar)
Number of Union	: 15
Number of Municipality	: 1 (Brahmanbari Sadar)
Total Candidates	: 5
Total Voters	: 310238
Male Voters	: 149600
Female Voters	: 160638
Total Polling Center	: 126
Total Polling Booth	: 591
Presiding Officers	: 126
Polling Officers	: 1182

SL	Name of the Candidate	Name Of Party	Symbol
1	Rabiul Alam Md. Obaidur Muktadir Rahman	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka
2	Md. Kaled Hossain Mahmud	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish
3	Md. Younus Miah	Jatiyo Samajtantric Dal (JSD)	Tara
4	Mr. Rezaul Islam Bhuyain	Jatiyo Paty	Plough
5	Niyazul Karim	Islamic Andolon Bangladesh	Hand Pakha

Result of 2008 National Election			
Name of Candidate	Party	Symbol	Vote
Mr. Lutful Hay	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	160050
Mr. Harun-al-Rashid	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	86587
Result of 2001 National Election			
Name of Candidate	Party	Symbol	Vote
Mr. Harun-al-Rashid	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	150,074
Mr. Advocate Humayun Kabir	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	123,158
Result of 1996 National Election			
Name of Candidate	Party	Symbol	Vote
Mr. Harun-al-Rashid	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	77,204
Mr. Lutful Hay	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	72,525

Annex-3

**Fact Sheet
Habiganj-1 by-Election-2011**

Date of By-Election	: 27 January 2011
Last date of submission of nomination paper	: 2 January 2011
Scrutiny date of Nomination paper	: 4 January 2011
Last date of withdrawal	: 11 January 2011
Number of Upazila	: 2 (Nabiganj and Bhubal)
Number of Union	: 20
Number of Municipality	: 1 (Nabiganj)
Total Candidates	: 6
Total Voters	: 285908
Male Voters	: 135935
Female Voters	: 149973
Total Polling Center	: 167
Total Polling Booth	: 643
Presiding Officers	: 167
Polling Officers	: 1286

SL	Name of the Candidate	Name Of Party	Symbol
1	Dr. Md. Musfik Hossain Chpwdhuary	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka
2	Shaikh Shujat Mia	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish
3	Dr. Monmahan Debnath	Krisak Sramik Janata League	Gamchha
4	Md Abdul Monim Chowdhuary	Jatiya Paty	Plough
5	Sheikh Abdul Quiyum	Khalafot Andolon	Hand Pakha
6	Mowlana Abdul Malik Chowdhuary	Jomayet Ulum Islam Bangladesh	

Result of 2008 National Election			
Name of Candidate	Party	Symbol	Vote
Dewan Farid Gazi	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	152080
Shaikh Shujat Mia	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	79488
Result of 2001 National Election			
Name of Candidate	Party	Symbol	Vote
Dewan Farid Gazi	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	74,693
Shaikh Shujat Mia	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	66137
Result of 1996 National Election			
Name of Candidate	Party	Symbol	Vote
Dewan Farid Gazi	Bangladesh Awami league	Nouka	52940
Khalilur Rahman Chowdhuary	Jatiya Paty	Plough	44113
Shaikh Shujat Mia	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Dhaner Shish	27248

