

Democracywatch

Report on Gazipur-2 By-election

1st August 2004

Democracywatch

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Introduction

Democracywatch has been observing all national and local elections, by-elections and re-elections from its inception in 1995. In this connection the organization observed Gazipur-2 by-election, which was held on 1st August 2004. The organization recruited about 28 observers on the Election Day and another 12 observers to monitor pre-election situation of Gazipur-2 by-Election.

Objective of Democracywatch election monitoring

The specific objective of Democracywatch election monitoring program was to ensure the fairness of the electoral process and to build public confidence in the elections.

The organization monitored the by-election to achieve the following objectives

1. To encourage large-scale participation of voters in the election by building confidence on the electoral process.
2. To detect election fraud, manipulation and irregularities
3. Ensure free, fair and meaningful election

Organizational structure of election monitoring

Democracywatch is a non-partisan and credible organization at all levels. The election observation network involved a young, educated and trained group supported by the National Secretariat located in Dhaka. The network also involved local partners who have been doing this work for a long time.

Democracywatch election monitoring activities

Fact Sheet on Gazipur-2 by-Election: Democracywatch produced a fact sheet on Gazipur-2 by-election before the election. It also disseminated this fact sheet to donors, Democracywatch partners and National newspapers.

Pre-election monitoring:

Democracywatch has designed a pre-election form to cover the pre-situation of Gazipur – 2 by-elections. A number of 12 local observers observed the pre-election situation of Gazipur-2 by-election. Democracywatch observed the following things, which related to the election:

1. Violation of electoral code of conduct by the candidates
2. Election related violence
3. Role of Election Commission.

Both the Ruling four party alliance and Awami league violated code of conduct in their election campaign for Gazipur-2 by-election. Both the candidates spent huge money for election campaign, which was much higher than the ceiling fixed by the election commission. Democracywatch noted that thousands of posters pasted on walls, huge number of big banners and festoons were enough to prove that the candidates must have exceeded the election limit. However the Election Commission took some strong measures to hold free and fair election by replacing some partisan presiding officers, a fact which was appreciated by Democracywatch.

Election Day Monitoring

Some 28 trained observers from Democracywatch observed 58 polling stations out of a total of 195 in the by-election in Gazipur-2 constituency on August 1.

Democracywatch observers reported that there were large numbers of voters present in front of all polling stations. Many female voters were seen with their children implying a safe environment. The voters maintained discipline despite having to wait for long hours. The polling officials and law enforcing agencies also played a great role during the election.

According to Democracywatch the election was free, fair and peaceful. Positive desire of government, Effective steps by the EC, Efficiency of law enforcing agencies, Comprehensive monitoring by the observers added an extra value to this election. This election has already gained much credibility by all sectors.

According to Democracywatch some of the following reasons made this election different:

- Both the major candidates maintained friendly relation till the election
- No incidents report was found
- The election material was adequate and the role of Election officials was responsible
- The performance of law enforcing agencies was excellent
- Due to flood some centres has been changed but voters were enthusiastic
- The role of Election Commission was effective from starting the election
- Election irregularities were very few

Due to the above reasons the election was free and fair. Democracywatch appreciated EC role and all concerned, to hold this election peacefully.

In spite of all these things Democracywatch observers found some irregularities in some centres, which as are follows

False Vote:

Our observers received some complaints on false voters in ERCPH, Noagaon Abdul Majid Primary School and Kolomeshaor Rokeya Saroni Girls High School centers. Police arrested Mr Hares presenting a false vote. Sefali Begum (, voter no 625) a voter also found the same name voters waiting in the queue at Munno textile school centre. Due to wrong entry in the voter list one female voter Rezina Akther could not cast her vote.

Election Materials and Environment:

The environment at 58 centres observed by Democracywatch was good. The election material was also adequate. Some of the voters complained that the quality of indelible ink was not satisfactory at Shahid Smiriti Primary School centre. It was observed that there was inadequate lighting in 2 centres such as Bangladesh Machine Tools High School and BDP Secondary School. In Ballot Paper no 0076709 and 0076762 did not have any symbols at Shalna Government Primary School centre.

Polling Agent

Democracywatch observers reported the presence of a considerable number of polling agents appointed by the candidates. Some agents appeared to be untrained and underage. In Shafiduddin Sarkar Academy Centres there was no BNP polling agent in one booth at 11.a.m. In Kaultia Government Primary School there was no BNP agent in booth number 3. In booth no 5 and 6 only one BNP polling agent was seen at Bahadurpur Government Primary School. One JP polling agent was seems to be under aged at Kolomeshor Government School Centre.

Lack of voter education

Lack of voter education was seen in almost all polling stations. In Munno Textile Centre, some female voters could not cast their votes. They didn't know the actual voting process. It was the same case in Bilaspur Rahmania and Hafizia Madrasha ,Mogorkhal Government Primary School and Shalna Government Primary School centres which produced the same scenario clearly indicating that there was huge lack of voter education among the female voters.

Performance of Law enforcing agencies

The performance of law enforcing agencies was excellent. Adequate Police, Armed police, Ansar, VDP and BDR were recruited to maintain peaceful environment in the polling centres. Army was recruited on a mobile basis. One Magistrate was recruited for each polling centres to maintain law and order situation peacefully.

The election was festive due to absence of any terrorism or violence. Democracywatch feels that Gazipur by- election was obviously better than 16 previous by-election held during the Eight Jatyia Sangshad. The organization also thought that if the government and EC want to hold free and fair election they could do it.

Press Conference

Democracywatch organized a press conference on Gazipur-2 by-election on 5th August 2004 at Democracywatch Auditorium. Executive Director of Democracywatch Taleya Rehman, Program Manager Mostafa Sohel and Wajed Feroj were also present in the conference.

Taleya Rehman said ‘In spite of some irregularities the election was held in a free, fair and peaceful atmosphere’. She also said that an independent election commission and voter identity card is the two pre-requisites for a free and fair election.

A number of 22 journalists from different national dailies and weeklies were present at the conference.

Some Recommendation by Democracywatch to hold free and fair election in the future

1. Different observers groups monitoring the election at this moment. But EC doesn't provide any provision in law to protect them on the eve of election monitoring. Democracywatch strongly recommended enacting this law for strong election monitoring.
2. Democracywatch feels that Comprehensive training should be provided for election officials.
3. Lack of voter education seen in almost all the polling centres. NGO and other concerned group should come forward to work in this regard.
4. Comprehensive training should be needed for election observers.
5. Democracywatch strongly suggest that the number of polling booths for women should be increased.
6. Process of issuing of the voter ID card should develop with in a very short time.
7. The election officials, members of the law enforcing agencies related to electoral process could not cast their votes. EC should take this matter into their consideration.