

Interim Report on the monitoring of Sylhet City Corporation Election by Democracywatch

Dhaka, 10 August, 2008... Democracywatch- a leading election monitoring organization in Bangladesh deployed 380 stationary observers on behalf of Election Working Group (EWG) which covered 380 booths and 65 centers in Sylhet City Corporation. Apart from this a group of mobile observers covered other 30 centers on a mobile basis to determine the election environment, voting process and counting process as well as to act as a civil society watchdog to build public confidence in this historic election.

Democracywatch organized several observers training, coordinators meeting and finally held an operation planning meeting with all the respective team leaders of Sylhet before the Election Day in Sylhet.

Observer General Report

According to stationary observers of Democracywatch the Sylhet City Corporation Elections were held peacefully and termed as a free, fair and meaningful though the rain started at the very beginning of the polling and continued till mid day marred by the festive mood of election. Due to this, voters queue were not seen in many pooling stations on the morning and especially women suffered a lot.

A number of 1, 92,362 votes were cast in Sylhet City Corporation Election of which 1, 16,710 were women. Democracywatch observers reported that voter's turn out was about 65 to 70%.

About 99% DW observers reported that voter's did not face any obstruction or intimidation to come to the voting centers to cast their votes. There was huge turn out of women voters some with little babies with their arms waited patently for hours. About 99% observers from 380 booths reported that there was no incident seen on intimidation by the any candidate agents. But a number of polling agents made allegation that they didn't receive any ID card so they faced some difficulties to perform their duties on the polling day.

But there was a big question mark raised by the observers that out of 380 DW observers only 15 were allowed to see the counting process. According to DW observers the counting process went smoothly.

Apart from this, election materials were adequate. The performance of Law Enforcing Agencies was satisfactory. Elderly and physically challenged voters cast their vote without any hassle. The polling station officials generally conducted their work fairly.

Although few areas where election officials were not fully oriented or trained regarding national ID card with photograph procedure. In general most officials appeared familiar with the procedure.

Democracywatch observers made some observations as follows;

- In PTI Training Institute male and female booth, polling started after 8 a.m. Some centers were not able to start voting on time due to rain and lack of voters in the

morning like Blue Bird School, Gausuddin Non Government Primary School, Police line school, and Abdul Gafur Islamia School etc.

- Some secret booth was suffering from lack of adequate light and was not prepared carefully. Gausuddin, Shajallal Adorso (Booth 3, 4), Shajallal Adorso Biddaloy are the instances.
- In bluebird school, a secret booth was prepared in front of an open window which looks odd. In Sarda Smriti Bhavan four booths were established in a small room, so voters were faced with a lot of difficulties.
- There was a huge confusion among the voter's in almost every center due to inconsistency of voters ID card and serial number pasted in the wall by the Election authority.
- Due to using three ballot papers the voting process was bit slowly.

In some polling stations there were instances of slow voting process at midday

Summary Comment

Apart from very few incidents the Sylhet city corporation election 2008 was held in a free, fair and peaceful environment. This is an interim report. A final report will be published when all the forms and reports come from remote areas.

Recommendations

- Civil Society organizations should form voters camp in front of polling station to give a guideline for general voters
- Government and non-government organizations should conduct technical voter education programs especially for women to familiarize with the voting process. i.e. (Mock voting etc)
- Need comprehensive training for polling agents and presiding officers to conduct a meaningful election.
- There should be an open official gazetting on the allocation of ballot boxes in each center, so that no further confusion arises.
- Civil society organization should come forward to train polling agents for fair election.
- Watching the constituencies from where women contested women against male contestant to see what kind of difficulties and problems they faced.