

Report on Comilla City Corporation Eection-2012



DEMOCRACYWATCH
Involving people building democracy

7 Circuit House Road

Ramna, Dhaka – 1000.

Tel: 8802 9344 225-6, 8802 9330 405

Fax: 8802 8315 807

E-mail: dwatch@banpla.net, Web: www.dwatch-bd.org

Introduction

Democracywatch has been observing all national and local elections, by-elections and re-elections from its inception in 1996. In this connection the organization observed Comilla City Corporation Election, which was held on 5 January 2012. The organization recruited 10 mobile observers on the Election Day to monitor the election situation of Comilla City Corporation Election. This initiative was supported by The Asia Foundation.

Objectives of Democracywatch election monitoring

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

The organization monitored the municipality election to achieve the following objectives

- To encourage large-scale participation of voters in the election by building confidence on the electoral process.
- To detect election fraud, manipulation and irregularities
- Deter irregularities, intimidation and undue influence in election.
- Ensure people's all-out participation, especially women and new voters in the electoral process.
- Ensure free, fair, meaningful, and participatory election.



Observer Training

Democracywatch took comprehensive 10 observer's training session at Dhaka. Sessions were conducted by Mostafa Sohel, Director of Democracywatch.

Following topic were discussed in this training sessions

- An introduction, which briefly describes the formation of the organization and its principal and goals.

- A concise historical perspective, which explains the significance of the election monitoring.
- An overview on the evolution of nonpartisan election monitoring efforts.
- A description of the responsibilities of various election officials.
- A code of conduct and guideline for observers
- A description of the activities undertaken by observers before and during the Election Day and the details involved in election manuals.
- Briefing on Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and Voting process
- Election data and information collection system of Democracywatch

In addition Democracywatch also briefed about the Election Working Group's plan and reporting system to the observers.

Election Day Monitoring

A total number of 10 trained observers from Democracywatch observed 15 polling stations out of a total of 65 in Comilla City Corporation election held was on 5 January 2012.

Democracywatch observers reported that there were large numbers of voters present in 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 positive role during the election.



The general voters were seen enthusiastic on Electronic Voting Machine and many voters expressed their deep satisfaction on it.

Voter Management

Though the Election held in a peaceful manner, the Democracywatch observers have been detected weak voter management at some polling centers:

- In ward 17, there were two polling centers named Telikona Government Primary School and Bismillah Kindergarten on the two sides of a narrow road. For this reason lack of discipline was found there from the very morning. As there were 7806 voters for these two centers, all the voters had to stand in a same line on the road.
- No special arrangements for the olds, pregnant and disabled was noticed at any of the centers
- At Telikona Government Primary School, an old woman named Tera Banu was seen to sit for a long as she could not find out her booth. A blind man named Rafikul Islam was seen to stand for long in the line. In the same center, at booth number 7, a disable woman was seen to cast her vote inside the secret room with 2 general voters along with her.
- At Telikona Government Primary School and Telikona High School centers there was no electricity supply from 8.00 am to 9.30 am. Within this time the CC camera became deactivated and there was severe scarcity of light over there that time.

The absence of the polling agents

Some of the Mayor candidate's agents were not seen at Shaktola High School, Bismillah Kindergarten and Telikona Government Primary School. In some polling centres the agents were seen to roaming around outside the booth because of the scarcity of space.



Undue Influence

The candidates used vehicles to carry the voters in most of the polling centers observed by Democracywatch. Rickshaws pasted with the posters of different symbols were observed at Munshi M Ali Girls' School and Karim Adarsha Primary School.

False Vote

At Karim Adarsha Primary School a man named Alauddin tried to cast a false vote in the name of some Dulal Hosen. He was punished by the mobile court. On the other hand, another person was caught by the police as he was trying to cast a false vote for some Nizamuddin Hauladar.

Election Materials

There were adequate materials in the observed 15 polling centers.

The Law and Order Situation

The law and order situation of all the observed polling centers was satisfactory. In every center there was plenty of Police, Battalion Anser and DVP. In addition, there were lots of Police, RAB and Magistrates were seen to perform duties in a mobile basis.

Counting Process

At the end of the polls, the counting process began which was open and transparent in all Municipalities. The Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers, polling officers in the presence of different party agents completed the counting. In some polling stations Democracywatch observers were permitted to observe the counting process along with the Presiding officials.

Recommendations to Bangladesh Election Commission

Although the election was generally free and fair but a few more steps would make it perfect

- Need more voter awareness programs on EVM especially for women and elderly voters.
- Democracywatch believes that Election Commission and local administration should maintain close coordination in conducting an election.
- If the numbers of women's booths are increased in each center, the voting process would be easier, as women take longer time to cast vote.
- Election Commission should arrange long term training for the presiding officers and polling officers to conduct election smoothly.
- Special booths for disabled and aged should be set up in the centers preferably on the ground floor.
- Polling stations should be located closer to the voters.
- Election Commission and Election monitoring organizations should arrange Civic Voter Education Campaign both at National and local level to let people know about the role and of voters on EVM process.
- District Election Office and Upazila Election office should arrange candidate consultation meeting on election activities and role of candidate's behavior.
- Given the importance of the political party agents' roles in the polling stations and lack of skill and understanding, it is strongly suggested that they must be well trained on their role and activities on Election Day.

Democracywatch Fact Sheet
Comilla City Corporation Election-2012

Date of Election	5 January 2012
Last date of submission of nomination paper	2 December 2011
Scrutiny date of Nomination paper	4-5 December 2011
Last date of withdrawal	14 December 2011
Symbol Distribution	15 December 2011
Start Election Campaign	15 December 2011
Number of Total ward	27
Mobile Court	9
Number of Reserve seat for Women	9
Total voters	1,69,273
Total Male Voter	83,199
Total Female Voter	86,074
Total Polling Center	65
Total Polling booth	421
Returning officer	1
Asst. Returning officer	9
Presiding officer	65
Asst. Presiding officer	511
Polling officer	885
Total Mayor Candidate	9
Total Male Councilor	217
Total Female Councilor	69
Total Election Officer	1461
Law enforcement agencies	BGB, Police, Ansar, VDP, RAB and Army
Electronic Voting Machining (EVM)	100%

SL	Name of the Mayor Candidate	Symbol	Achieved Vote
1	Mr. Monirul Haque Shakku	Hash	65,577
2	Advocate Afzal Khan	Pineapple	36,471
3	Mr. Nur Ur Rahman Mahmud Tanim	Jahaz	8,514
4	Advocate Anisur Rahman Mitu	Chasma	3,994
5	Mr. Ear Ahmed Salim	Television	7,961
6	Ms. Shirin Akhter	Tala	1,103
7	Mr. Chanchal Kumar Gosh	Ghora	890
8	Major (Retd) Mamunur Rashid	Ink pen	585
9	Md. Salman Sayed	Cup-Priz	427

Case Study on Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in CCC Election

Introduction

Bangladesh Election Commission has introduced full fledged Electronic Voting Machine in Comilla City Corporation Election on January 5, 2012. Democracywatch has monitored closely 15 centers out of total 65 centers under the network of Election Working Group.

For this case study we have selected one polling centre named Telikona Government Primary School, Comilla (Ward no 17, Centre no 37, Booth 7, Voter 2784, centre only for female). The name of the Presiding Officer is Mr. Mahmudul Haque and the Technical Assistant was Mr. Ferdous.

General Comment

Generally it was seen that the Returning Officer distributed the 9 EVM and Close Circuit Camera (CC Camera) to the Presiding Officer, Assistant Presiding Officers and Technical Assistants previous night of the voting day. In each booth there was a voting ballot paper with symbols and posters to make people understand about the EVM system.



Voters Comment

EVM is a unique example of carrying out a successful election. But it needs more awareness campaigns for the voters and proper training to the respective election officers. 'If the drawbacks can be reduced then EVM can be a user friendly and an easy process for voting in a short time' Returning Officer said to DW observers.

Following are the outlooks of some voters that are interviewed after casting their votes at Telikona Government Primary School in Comilla City Corporation-

- 1) Rina Begum (voter card no. 1926717120512) said “I am really happy with this Electronic Voting system as it takes only a few seconds to cast my vote and it’s a straightforward process. The people working in the Election process campaigned about EVM and could make us understand easily how to use it”.
- 2) Hasina Khatun: “I was not so sure if I could vote in EVM system because I could not be present there when they were giving the orientation to the voters on EVM. But after casting my vote, now I am happy with it.”
- 3) Hamida: “I cannot understand how to use this machine to vote as I didn’t get any information on it previously. And there is a fear of being electrified because there are so many wires all around the machine. I could not understand what switch to push on and if my vote had been cast after pressing the switches.”

Candidate’s Agents Comments

Agent Shukhi Begum said that “The EVM process is a good development, it takes a little time both in casting and counting votes. But it needs a proper orientation both for the voters and the election officers to run it more easily and smoothly.”

Another agent named Hazera Begum said that “EVM is slightly a tough process yet for the uneducated, old and women voters. If any voter cannot understand how to press the right button, it will take a long time and it will make the whole process slow. If the Election Commission takes action for more awareness building and orientation for the general voters and training to the officials then it could be the best method for election in future”.

General Impression of voters

Generally the positive impression we got from the voters on EVM are as follows-

- 1) quick process
- 2) handy
- 3) easy method
- 4) It takes a very little time in casting votes
- 5) Counting is easy in EVM
- 6) It’s a reliable process since there is a little chance of cheating or miscounting

On the other hand, according to some voters it also has some shortcomings which can be reduced or even removed by taking proper actions like voter awareness programs on EVM and trainings for the related polling officers. The negative impressions are threatening the voters by the candidates; fear of vote convert and less voter awareness.

Technical fusibility

According to the Election officers the EVM is a simple and easy system which has been run by charging it and this electric charge remains up to 30 hours. For this, if there is no electricity it can also work properly.

Most of the Election related officers, e.g., Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers, Polling Officers are teachers or other professionals so all of them are not EVM user friendly. For this reason they need proper training on it because lack of training may cause total fail of election of any centre/ centers.

It will be good if there is the manual system of poll along with the EVM as a second line of defense.

Organizational Capacity

Election Commission doesn't have adequate technical expertise, logistic support, IT support and enough human resource to run the EVM process smoothly. We are recommending for recruiting at least one (1) IT person for the time being to run the total process at election time.

Management and Administration

Though the management team accomplished and ensured the testing, deployment and security for the electronic and technical sides, we think still they need to conduct lot of trainings to the persons who will work in the polling centers. But we also talked with the Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers and they all said that they are easy going and friendly with this Electronic Voting System and machine and they are happy that it needs a very short time.

Transparency

This is a beautiful and time consuming process of casting and counting vote. Everyone can see the total number of votes on a screen. So it can prevent electoral fraud.

Secrecy

Generally there should not be any provision to see what symbol the previous voter vote on, but while monitoring we found a few booths where a voter can see the previous person's vote because of the mismanagement and inefficiency of the responsible Election Officers. It should be taken under consideration in future.

Counting Process

EVM is obviously better and easier than the manual counting process in election. We can get result from a centre within 30 minutes in EVM system where manual system needed a pretty long time. Another thing is in EVM process, at Comilla City Corporation Election, we could get the final result by 8 pm where the manual system might need at least 10 pm.