



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

**LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH
ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION**

27 – 31 December 2008

REPORT BY MR Charles TANNOCK
CHAIRMAN OF THE DELEGATION

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INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Bangladeshi authorities, the Conference of Presidents decided at its meeting on 23 October to authorise the sending of a delegation of the European Parliament to observe the legislative elections in Bangladesh, at that time scheduled for the 18 December. The Constitutive Meeting of the EP EOM was held in Strasbourg on the 19th November and M. Robert Evans (PSE,UK) was elected Chairman.

However, the rescheduling of the Election date in Bangladesh to the 29th December made it, unfortunately, not possible for many of the Members initially appointed by their Political Groups to maintain their availability. A new constitutive meeting was therefore held on the 10th December, with M. Charles Tannock (EPP/ED, UK) elected Chairman of a 4-strong delegation; as is customary, these Members were appointed by the political groups in accordance with the rolling d'Hondt system (the list of participants is annexed to this report; the ALDE political group gave its seat to the N/I group).

Taking into account this change of dates, the Conference of Presidents re-examined the situation at its meeting of the 17th December and confirmed its initial decision to send a parliamentary delegation.

As is usual, the European Parliament's delegation was fully integrated into the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), which was led by Mr Alexander Graf LAMBSDORFF, MEP (ALDE, D). The EU EOM deployed 150 observers from 25 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

Bangladeshis went to the polls on December 29 in record numbers, with the secular Awami League party, headed by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed, winning the elections.

Provisional results released 24hrs after Election Day indicated, already, that the Awami League had won some 230 of the 300 seats in the *Jatiya Sangsad*, Bangladesh's Parliament. Allied parties won another 30 seats, giving the victorious "Grand Alliance" a three-fourths majority in Parliament, the biggest parliamentary majority since 1973. Another 45 seats, allocated to women MPs, remained to be distributed to the political parties: as this distribution has to be proportionally to their seats at the JS, the overall result is not affected.

Although initially alleging widespread rigging, former Prime Minister Khaleda ZIA, whose Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had won a two-thirds majority in the last Parliamentary elections in 2001, conceded defeat with her party's worst-ever showing of just 27 seats.

The EU EOM and other international observers concluded that the "*outcome of the election appears to reflect the will of the people of Bangladesh. EU EOM observers did not report patterns of fraud in the process*".

After two years of military-backed emergency rule, the overwhelming vote in favour of a secular political party is a strong indicator that the world's fourth-largest Muslim country will continue forging a path toward democratic development, albeit in the

face of tremendous challenges from poverty, natural disaster, Islamist extremism, and pervasive corruption.

A. Political context:

Bangladesh is a young country, securing independence in 1971 after a nine-month long civil war with Pakistan that left three million people dead. The new state had to endure famines, natural disasters and widespread poverty, as well as political turmoil and military coups. Independence in 1971 was followed shortly by fifteen years of military rule, which eventually gave way to a peaceful transition to democracy in 1991.

Since then, Bangladesh essentially has a two-party-system with Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the lead roles. These have alternated in power since the return to democratic government in the 1990s. BNP and Awami League each provide an anchor for a coalition with a handful of smaller parties. On the other hand, the Jatiya Sangsad has very often proven to be a dysfunctional Parliament, with little or no space being allowed to the Opposition for constructive criticism – leading, in turn, to sterile protests of parliamentary “walkouts” which, in the long run, undermine the democratic system.

The socio-economic situation is poor but improving. Bangladesh relies less on foreign aid than in the past although it is still dependent on loans and the economy is overall stable, even following the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement which governed the global trade in textiles and garments from 1974 to 2004. Education is expanding and there is a strong NGO sector working in all sectors of social development. Nonetheless, party rivalries pervade civil society and truly independent organisations are few while nearly half the population live on less than USD1 a day.

Bangladesh has a poor human rights record and suffers from severe corruption, ranking last in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for five years in a row between 2000 and 2005. In 2007 it moved up to 162d place of 169 countries. Although an Anti-Corruption Commission was established in November 2004, with the authority to conduct investigations and try corruption cases in special courts, doubts remain as to whether this body is itself independent, either politically or financially.

One feature, observed also in some other South Asian countries, is that elections are held under a non-partisan caretaker government (CTG), which takes over in the run up to a general election and whose role is to ensure that the elections are free and fair. According to the Constitution, elections must take place within a maximum of three months from the last day of parliament: thus, Parliamentary elections were due to be held in January 2007 in Bangladesh. However, following weeks of protests over the vote that deteriorated into violence, the state of emergency was declared on January 11 and the elections postponed sine die. Hours earlier, and as a result of the widespread violence that was going on, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, had taken the decision to suspend the EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) on the grounds that conditions for credible elections were missing.

During the twenty four months that it has been in power, the caretaker government has also had to take policy decisions – which, in a normal context, would not have been the

case; thus, apart from the electoral reforms which were necessary, the CTG has also undertaken a number of institutional and electoral reforms (new Electoral Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, Public Service Commission), enshrined the separation of the judiciary and the executive, proceeded with local government reform and, most saliently, launched a campaign against corruption, a serious concern in Bangladesh, which resulted in the arrest and prosecution of about a hundred senior politicians from different political parties. Over thirty former Members of Parliament or Ministers have now been convicted on charges of corruption. Businessmen, civil servants and other influential politicians from across the political spectrum have also been accused of corruption and detained by the security forces. The two leading politicians in the country, leaders of the two largest parties and arch-enemies Sheikh Hasina of AL and Khaleda Zia of BNP, were detained in 2007 and charged in several corruption-related cases, which have since been stayed by the High Court or withdrawn. They have, along with many of their party colleagues, in recent months been released on bail.

While most analysts argue that the CTG was more in less in place to implement an agenda initially under the impulse of the military – which took special care not to appear at the direct front stage of the political developments in Bangladesh. However, the cornerstone of this strategy would have been the removal of both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia (“*minus 2 scenario*”), which was not the case. On the other hand, and with the Parliament being in recess during these 24 months, the CTG’s ruled by ordinances, issuing about 100 of them: this body of law has, now, to be examined by the newly elected Parliament **within 30 days**. Thus, an early indication of whether the reforms undertaken will be ratified –and given firm, even if retroactive, democratic legitimacy– is expected relatively soon after the new Government takes power: this will also demonstrate whether the mainstream political parties are really willing to continue with the CTG’s stated priority of fighting corruption.

Together with the gradual lifting of the State of Emergency (which was relaxed on the way to the elections, and fully lifted on 17th December, as demanded by the international community and the EP), a detailed timetable for the elections was announced in early November 2008, with December 18 as the voting date. Campaigning by the political parties was largely peaceful, and lasted about 2 weeks; the polls were however again postponed to December 29 as the BNP, in an attempt to win more time to settle internal divisions and build up political capital, was again threatening to boycott the elections in an atmosphere of high political tension.

A boycott by one of the main political parties would have undermined the credibility of the polls and made the formation of a stable government impossible. Although most of the demands of the BNP were not met (such as a postponement of 90 days or the suspension of article 91e, which gives to the Electoral Commission the possibility to disqualify candidates, even if elected, that would have broken the electoral code of conduct), the postponement of the elections by 10 days was granted to the BNP mostly to allow it save face.

B. Before the Elections

The Election Commission and the Final Voters List (FVL)

One of the main reasons behind the mass protests which led to the postponement of the 2006 elections was that the voter’s register was very widely perceived as being out

of date and featuring large numbers of fake voters. In this context, it was argued, it would have been extremely easy to rig the elections.

The new Electoral Commission, appointed by the CTG, recognised that the old voters register was, in effect, un-useable and decided that a completely new one would be needed in order for plausible elections to be conducted – as task, it warned immediately, which would take more than 18 months.

Thus, a fresh voter registration process, based on a door-to-door enumeration campaign, was conducted from August 2007 to early July 2008. It has been perceived as a largely successful exercise, leading to the production of a better quality voter list with clear photographs containing **81.1 million registered voters** (female: 50,9% ; male: 49,1%), with 31% of them expected to vote for the first time. As argued by many analysts and many domestic observers NGOs, met by the Delegation, this figure corroborates that a staggering 12,5 – 14 million entries in the old register were fake or outdated ones ; it is worth noting that none of the political parties which took part in the vote contested this point, implicitly confirming that were elections to have taken place under the old list in 2007, there would have been valid grounds to claim them non credible.

The voter registration exercise was completed in October 2008 with the delivery of the last ID cards to eligible voters. The Final Voter List (FVL) and new ID cards had already been used, for the first time, in local government polls which took place on 4 August 2008 and which were considered as a successful “test run” in view of the December general elections.

This being said, in the meetings it had, the Delegation identified two main drawbacks of this Final Voters List (FVL): the first one is the cut-off date for the inclusion in the FVL was set at 1/1/2008. This meant that about 3 million voters were disenfranchised from the electoral process --- although it was known well ahead of the election date that they would be of age on voting day. The Delegation finds it more than surprising, and definitely discriminatory, that no provisions were undertaken to include them in the voting process, since a Supplementary Voting List was foreseen (on top of the FVL) in order to enable about 200/300 “happy few”, who had missed the registration deadline, to vote.

Secondly – and this was admitted also by the authorities – the current provisions on postal ballots are deeply dissatisfying, given the “totally dysfunctional” state of the national post. This effectively means that polling staff, the (impressive) security apparatus mobilised to guard the polling stations, diplomats posted abroad plus all the prisoners in jails, although granted voting rights, have been denied them in practice: a total of 1million persons further disenfranchised from the system – not counting the Diaspora.

Specific aspects of the electoral legislation: media landscape, campaigning, expenses

The media landscape in Bangladesh during the election period cannot be assessed as being satisfactorily regulated, as there is a lack of procedures and regulations that would be established by the relevant bodies to provide clear rules. In particular, there is an absence of precise details governing access for candidates to the state-owned

media, as well as a lack of requirements such as balance and objectivity for electronic media in general.

On the other hand, it should be reminded that on 3 November 2008, i.e. more than 6 weeks prior to the elections, the State of Emergency rules that had a media impact were repealed: journalists that had suffered significant restrictions agreed from then on they were enjoying a higher degree of freedom, although cases of self-censorship (mainly *vis-a-vis* the Army's role) did remain. It should be reminded here that, even during the State of Emergency times, Bangladeshis were extremely politically conscious – with people crowding around TV in villages (written press being less followed).

An attempt to draft a Code of Conduct for the Media was undertaken in mid-November, under the auspices of the Election Commission, but no report was delivered in due time ; the Election Commission recommended, at the time, that the next political government should tackle this issue in view of the regional elections foreseen at the end of February 2009.

Nonetheless, and in a last-minute attempt to provide some rules on Audio-Visual coverage on state-owned media only, the Ministry of Information published on 11/12 the following provisions for equitable time to the political parties contesting the elections:

- Parties competing in 30/50 constituencies : 10 minutes of airtime
- Parties competing in 50/70 constituencies : 15 minutes of airtime
- Parties competing in 70/100 constituencies : 20 minutes of airtime
- Parties competing in 100/300 constituencies : 40 minutes of airtime

It should be noted that an “electoral blackout” on political activities was instituted 48hrs before Election Day.

As far as political expenses are concerned, the Election Commission took a firm stance on the submission of polls expenses; candidates had to submit a financial declaration *before* the election (in the context of fight against corruption), but also 30 days *after* the publication of election result. Those failing to do so, irrespective of whether they had been elected or not, could face jail terms of 2 to 7 years.

Other steps taken by the Election Commission in order to prevent political parties, or candidates, from influencing voters on Election Day included:

- The total prohibition of motorised vehicles on Election Day, except for inter-city and emergency vehicles – a ban which, the Delegation saw, was enforced.
- Furthermore, no banners were allowed – only black and white, standardised, posters, which candidates were not allowed to paste on any wall or structure.

C. Election Day

To cover the **Election Day**, the Delegation split into 2 groups, which both observed the elections in Dhaka and the immediate vicinity, monitoring the situation in

approximately 15 polling stations. MEPs had thus the opportunity to witness the counting of the ballots on the evening of Election Day, but also the public consolidation of the results which took place, on the early morning of the following day, in the premises of the Returning Officer's HQ (Dhaka Metropolitan Area results).

While Members of the Delegation fully subscribe and endorse the findings of the EU EOM (in annex), they also witnessed the fact that the FVL had an inherent “flaw of unfriendliness”, in the sense that it was impossible for each voter to exercise his democratic right without knowing his Voter Serial Number (VSN), as the individual allocation to polling booths was undertaken not alphabetically, as one would perhaps expect, but according to this VSN. The fact that VSN features 13 random digits, which are almost impossible to remember, and is a different number from the one featured on the ID cards –which were, on the other hand, issued for the first time as a result of electoral registration-, added an element of confusion.

What the Delegation thus saw, on Election Day, was that many voters who were confused about their VSN –and, hence, about the one and only polling booth where they would be allowed to vote- were given these indications not by the electoral authorities, but by the political parties themselves, on makeshift forms which were, effectively, tantamount to campaigning material (which should not normally be allowed – as these forms, once inside the polling booths, hinted clearly at the political preference of the voters, thus compromising the secrecy of the vote).

The “none of the above” option

A probably unique feature of the elections which took place in Bangladesh was the inclusion of the possibility, for the voters, to tick a “*none of the above*” option, expressing dissatisfaction at all of the candidates put forward by the political parties. In case the “none of the above” option gained an absolute majority in any given constituency, the elections in this particular constituency would have to be repeated for the seat to be filled, with the political parties proposing new candidates.

While this scenario did not materialise in any constituency, and despite a nation-wide score of just 0,55%, the significance of the “none of the above” possibility should not be under-estimated, in that it probably prevented some controversial candidates from being fielded by their respective political parties. All in all, the “none of the above” option should be seen as an additional mean of democratic control from the voter’s perspective: those who decided to vote this way made a conscious choice **not** to abstain in order to express their opinion, and often had to queue for a couple of hours to do so - given that the turn-out reached 87,06% (the highest in the history of the country).

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Annexes:

- A. List of participants**
- B. Programme**
- C. Statement of the EU Election Observation Mission**
- D. Press release of the EU Election Observation Mission**
- E. Results of the elections**

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH
ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION

27 – 31 December 2008

List of participants

Members

Mr Charles TANNOCK, UK, EPP-ED
Mr Neil PARISH, UK, EPP-ED
Mr Nirj DEVA, UK EPP-ED
Mr Koenraad DILLEN, BE, NI

Secretariat

Mrs Emilia GALLEGO PERONA, Administrator
Mr Philippe KAMARIS, Administrator

Political Groups

Mr Rob VERREYCKEN, NI

Abbreviations :

EPP-ED	European People's Party/European Democrats	GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
PSE	Party of European Socialists	UEN	Union for Europe of the Nations Group
ALDE	Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe	I-D	Independence/Democracy
Verts/ALE	Greens/European Free Alliance	NI	Non-attached

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH
ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION

27 – 31 December 2008

PROGRAMME

Saturday, 27 December 2008

Morning:

Arrival of Secretariat and Members in Dhaka and transfer to:
Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel
107 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue
Dhaka
Tel: +880-811 100518.00

15:00 – 17:00

Secretariat only

Preparatory meetings with EC DEL, EU EOM & IOM

18:00 – 19:00

Briefing by EC Delegation in Bangladesh
Mr. Charles Whiteley, Political, Trade and Press Officer
Venue: Sonargaon Hotel, Nirala Room

19:00 – 20:00

Exchange of views with Domestic Observer Groups
Ms. Sharmeen Murshid, CEO of BROTEE
Mr. Zahurul Alam, Director of EWG (TBC)
Venue: Sonargaon Hotel, Nirala Room

Sunday, 28 December 2008

09.00 – 11:30

EU EOM Core Team Briefing
Venue: Sonargaon Hotel, Nirala Room

12.00 – 13:45

Exchange of views with Dr ATM Huda, Chair of the Bangladesh Electoral Commission

Venue: Block5/6, Sher-e-Bangla, Nagar

14.00 – 15.15

Meeting with former PM Sheika Hassina
Awami League Chair
in presence of Mr H.T. Imam, Co-Chairman Election Committee
Venue: House 55A, Road 3A, Dhanmondi

15.30 – 16.30

Meeting with Jatiya Party
Mr Habibur Rahman, International Affairs Adviser to H.E. H M
Ershad
Venue: Sonargaon Hotel, Nirala Room

16.30 – 17.30

Joint meeting with representatives of the 4-party alliance Jamaat-e-Islami:
Mr Abdul Quader Molla, Assistant Secretary General
Mr Abdur Razzaq, Barrister-at-Law

Bangladesh Nationalist Party
Mr. Shafik Rehman
Ambassador Shamsur S. Chowdhury
Ambassador Sabihuddin Ahmed

Venue: Sonargaon Hotel, Nirala Room

18.00 – 19.30

Briefing by EU Heads of Mission in Dhaka
Residence of M. Frowein, Head of the EC Delegation
Venue: House 13B, Road 54, Gulshan-2

19.30 – 21.30

Dinner hosted by UK High Commissioner Stephen Evans (*Members only*)
High Commissioner's Residence
Venue: Dutabash Road, Baridhara

21.55 – 22.20

Exchange of views with former PM Khaleda Zia (*Members only*)
Venue: BNP Offices, 46th road

Monday, 29 December 2008: Election Day

Deployment in Observation teams in & around Dhaka Polling Stations

Tuesday, 30 December 2008

08.00 – 09.30

Working breakfast with Chief Observer Graf Lambsdorff and preliminary
assessment of the elections

Venue: Pacific Room, 8th floor, Sonargaon Hotel

10.00 – 12.00

Announcement of the Dhaka Metropolitan Area results

Venue: Returning Officer's Office, Dhaka

12.45 – 15.00

Lunch hosted by HE M. Moniruzzaman, outgoing Ambassador to the EU
(Members only)

13.30 – 15.30

Internal coordination meeting with EU EOM Core Team (*Secretariat only*)

Venue: Pacific Room, 8th floor, Sonargaon Hotel

16.00 – 18.00

Tour of the National Assembly

Venue: Sherebanglanagar, Dhaka

Wednesday, 31 December 2008

09.00 – 10.00

Coordination meeting with EU EOM Core Team (*Secretariat only*)

Venue: Pacific Room, 8th floor, Sonargaon Hotel

10.00 – 12.00

Internal EP Delegation meeting

Venue: Pacific Room, 8th floor, Sonargaon Hotel

15.30 – 17.00

EU EOM press conference and presentation of the preliminary statement

Venue: Sheraton Hotel, Marble room

17.00 – 18.30

Presentation of the National Liberation Museum

19.15

Departure of the Chairman of the delegation to the airport

04.00 am

Last Departures to the airport



EUROPEAN UNION
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
 Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections 2008

ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়ন নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ মিশন বাংলাদেশ ২০০৮



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Peaceful parliamentary elections mark an important step in the restoration of democratic governance to Bangladesh

31 December 2008, Dhaka

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) has been present in Bangladesh since 7 November 2008 following an invitation from the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Election Commission. The EU EOM is led by Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Member of the European Parliament. The EU EOM deployed 150 observers from 25 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland. The observers were deployed throughout Bangladesh to observe and assess the electoral process in accordance with international standards for elections as well as the laws of Bangladesh. The EU EOM was joined by a four member delegation from the European Parliament, led by Charles Tannock, Member of the European Parliament, which endorses this preliminary statement. On Election Day, observers visited some 800 polling booths in the 6 Divisions of Bangladesh to observe the opening, voting, counting and consolidation of results. The EU EOM will remain in country to observe post-election developments. This statement is preliminary; a final report including recommendations for future elections will be published in March 2009. The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions, and adhere to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation commemorated at the United Nations in October 2005.

Preliminary Conclusions

- **The 2008 parliamentary elections in Bangladesh mark an important step towards reestablishing democratic governance of the country. A remarkably peaceful environment and high turnout on Election Day showed the determination of the people of Bangladesh to return to democracy. Minor technical difficulties aside, professionalism, transparency and credibility were the hallmarks of this election. The outcome of the election appears to reflect the will of the people of Bangladesh. EU EOM observers did not report patterns of fraud in the process.**
- **There was a high degree of confidence in the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) which has shown itself to be neutral and has demonstrated its ability to conduct technically-sound elections. While discharging most of its responsibilities in a transparent and responsible manner, efficiency was hampered by overreaching: the BEC regulated beyond its practical capacity to implement, which overwhelmed the system and left some areas such as the postal ballot system and the regulation of the consolidation process poorly addressed.**

- Key improvements bringing elements of the process into line with international electoral standards include the Final Voter List (FVL) which proved to be accurate, inclusive and reliable and the new delimitation of constituencies ensuring greater compliance with the principle of equal suffrage. However, the right to vote was undermined by the omission of some 3 million 18-year olds unable to vote in this election due to the registration cut-off date of 1 January 2008.
- Voter information and civic education activities of the electoral administration were adequate. However, voter information on the option to vote for “None of the Above” was inconsistent and generally insufficient.
- The main legal basis for elections is the Representation of the People Order (RPO) which is excessively prescriptive in some places and insufficiently detailed in others. Over-regulation with the aim of transparency led to difficulty implementing some procedures, and some otherwise reasonable and useful processes, such as the scrutiny of candidates, disrupted the electoral preparations because of their implementation too close to Election Day.
- Following the lifting of the State of Emergency the campaign was generally conducted in an open and free environment with no reported restrictions on campaign meetings or rallies. The campaign was remarkably peaceful, however, there were some isolated incidents of violence between supporters of rival candidates.
- The presence of party/candidate agents as well as domestic observers was considered important and contributed to the transparency of the voting and counting processes at polling centre and polling booth level. However, the BEC’s reliance on party representatives to inform voters of their polling booths was unfortunate and arguably enabled campaign activities to continue on Election Day.
- Print and broadcast media covered the elections extensively and for the most part equitably. The media enjoyed a reasonable degree of freedom of expression with no reported instances of intimidation or violence against journalists during the campaign.
- Women and minority groups did not participate in the political or electoral administration process in any significant numbers, with very few holding decision making positions. The enfranchisement of Bihari people was a positive development.
- Civil society organisations played an important role in the process carrying out a number of election activities, including election observation, civic education, political party development and initiatives to increase women’s participation.
- The high democratic standard set by this election must be sustained in the following days and weeks as the country returns to democratic governance. This will depend on all political leaders and their supporters who have to demonstrate lasting respect

for the spirit of parliamentary democracy. It is important to note that a healthy democracy requires a meaningful and constructive role for the opposition, acting in parliament.

Preliminary Findings

BACKGROUND

The Parliamentary election held on 29 December 2008 was the ninth Parliamentary election since Bangladesh secured independence in 1971. The elections were originally scheduled to take place on 22 January 2007 under the administration of a non-partisan caretaker government, as provided-for in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. However, one of the main party alliances, led by Awami League (AL), decided to boycott the elections on the grounds that the caretaker government, headed by President Iajuddin Ahmed, was favouring its main opponent, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). On 11 January 2007, the EU and other international observer missions judged that conditions precluded credible elections and suspended their activities. The same day President Iajuddin Ahmed, under pressure from the army, cancelled the elections, resigned as Chief Advisor of the caretaker government, and declared a State of Emergency. A new caretaker government was appointed to prepare for credible and participatory elections and took office for an unspecified period of time.

In April 2007 the caretaker government committed to holding the elections before the end of 2008, a timeframe largely determined by the period of time required to complete a new electoral roll. To implement this project and other election-related reforms, the caretaker government appointed fresh leadership to the Bangladesh Electoral Commission (BEC).

The State of Emergency was declared under Article 141A of the Constitution and remained in force from 11 January 2007 to 16 December 2008. It curtailed fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution such as freedoms of movement, assembly, association, and expression. The ban on political party activity was gradually relaxed, with indoor meetings permitted in Dhaka from September 2007 and countrywide from August 2008. On 3 November 2008, the emergency rule restrictions on the freedoms of speech and expression were lifted. In the light of the restoration of these fundamental rights, the European Commissioner for External Relations, Dr Benita Ferrero-Waldner decided to deploy a full European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Bangladesh.¹ The State of Emergency was lifted as of 17 December 2008.

The BEC had originally scheduled the parliamentary elections to take place on 18 December 2008. However, following a threat from the BNP-led alliance not to participate in the elections unless they were postponed, a compromise was found to hold the elections on 29 December. The caretaker government and BEC also met several other demands put forward by the political parties, including the postponement of the upazila local elections by several weeks. The authorities thus made significant efforts to ensure that elections could take place in an environment acceptable to all parties.

¹ Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner had initially deployed an EU Election Assessment Mission with fewer observers and a more limited mandate than a full-fledged EOM.

The parliamentary elections were held in 299 single-member constituencies.² Thirty-eight registered political parties participated in the election. There were 1,538 candidates in the BEC's final list, including 141 independent candidates. Two main electoral alliances fought the elections, one led by AL, the other by BNP. The Jatiya Party (JP) of former President Ershad attached itself to the AL-led alliance and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) continued its alliance from the 2001 election with BNP. Five mostly new parties formed a third alliance called 'Jukta Front' (United Front) which together covered roughly one third of the constituencies.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The main legal acts governing the elections in Bangladesh are the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh of 1972 and the Representation of the People Order (RPO) of 1972 (as amended 2008). During the period of State of Emergency, changes and amendments to election related rules and regulations were promulgated as ordinances or statutory regulatory orders (S.R.O.)³ One of the first duties of a new parliament will be to accept or reject all ordinances and SROs authorized during the caretaker government.

Most of the new provisions expressed in ordinances and S.R.O.s have been included in the RPO, which is regarded as the consolidated electoral act. Significant improvements have been made in the areas of candidates' financial disclosure, political party registration and campaign spending limits. There are still shortcomings in areas such as election media coverage, which is largely unregulated, and disqualification criteria for candidates, as well procedures for allocating political party symbols to candidates.

Article 91E was the most discussed and criticised amendment to the RPO. It grants powers to the BEC to order an investigation and disqualify any candidate found to be in breach of the regulations. A disqualified candidate can only challenge the decision by filing a writ petition to the High Court.

The RPO has been amended several times since 1972. Some provisions are supported by detailed instructions while others are only general directives. The adjudication of minor campaign irregularities is an overregulated process creating a heavy workload for the election commission. Conversely, the provision for consolidation of the election results lacks an understandable description of the process.

In the month prior to Election Day the Supreme Court⁴ played a more significant role than expected. Many candidates rejected by the BEC availed themselves of their constitutional right to file a writ petition⁵ to the High Court to challenge the decisions of the BEC.

² The election in Noakhali-6 constituency was rescheduled for 12 January 2009, following the death of one of the nominated candidates.

³ Electoral Rolls Ordinance (Ordinance No. 18/2008); Political Party Registration Rules (S.R.O. No. 25/2008); Electoral Rolls Rules (S.R.O. No.31/2008); Code of Conduct for the Political Parties and the Candidates (No.269/2008); Conduct of Election Rules (S.R.O. No. 286/2008).

⁴ The Supreme Court of Bangladesh is the highest court of law. It is composed of a High Court division and an Appellate division. The High Court division hears appeals from lower courts and tribunals and also has original jurisdiction in some cases (e.g. in the case of election related issues) The Appellate division hears appeals from the High Court division.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

There was a greater degree of confidence in the current BEC than in its predecessor. The BEC consulted civil society and most political parties on reform of the electoral framework and this process was positively assessed by most stakeholders. Concerns remain about BEC meetings, which are not open to either observers or the media, and the minutes of which are not made public.

The BEC successfully carried out a review of constituency delimitations and completed the delimitation on 10 July 2008, which affected 133 out of 300 constituencies. The Commission adopted an average figure of approximately 267,000 voters per constituency and re-allocated parliamentary seats between districts and divisions. This helped ensure compliance with the principle of equal suffrage.

The BEC proved its ability to organize technically sound elections and was positively assessed by EU EOM observers for their efficiency and professionalism. The planning and implementation of the recruitment and training of election administration and polling staff were timely and adequate.

The BEC has extensive responsibilities and powers. As well as determining constituency delimitations and managing the polling and the results processes, the commission is mandated to conduct voter education, voter registration and candidate registration. It is also responsible for managing election-related complaints, including those related to campaign and media regulations. While discharging most of its responsibilities in a transparent and responsible manner, efficiency was hampered by overreaching: the BEC appears to have regulated beyond its practical capacity to implement, which overwhelmed the system and left some areas such as the postal ballot system and the regulation of the consolidation process poorly-addressed.

The voter information and civic education activities of the electoral administration were assessed as adequate by EU EOM observers. However, voter information on the 'None of the Above' voting option was inconsistent and generally insufficient. The BEC delegated most voter information and civic education to local civil society organizations, which conducted their activities with funding from the international community.

The postal voting process proved to be totally dysfunctional, and of nearly 1 million voters entitled to use this voting modality,⁶ only a minimal number requested a postal ballot before the original deadline of 27 November. The BEC extended the deadline, but still only a very small number of eligible voters sought postal ballots. This appeared to be for lack of information in most cases.

⁵ A legal instrument for remedies at the superior courts against the arbitrary or illegal actions of any authority or of the lower court.

⁶ Voters eligible for postal voting include security agents, prisoners, elections polling staff and other electoral personnel.

VOTER REGISTRATION

The voter registration process produced a good quality voter list with photographs. It was more accurate, inclusive and reliable than the previous voter lists of 2001 and 2006 following the elimination of duplicates and erroneous entries, as well as the registration of young voters and some marginalized segments of society. The Final Voter List (FVL) contained 81,130,973 voters, of whom 41,244,820 were women (50.9 per cent) and 39,787,636 were men (49.1 per cent). Political parties and candidates received a soft copy of the FVL, without photographs.

The right to vote for all Bangladeshi citizens over 18 has, in principle, been respected. However, it was undermined by the omission of some 3 million 18-year olds unable to vote in this election due to the registration cut-off date of 1 January 2008. There was no provision for enabling these individuals to register.

The BEC provided for a Supplementary Voter List (SVL) appended to the end of the regular electoral register to which, at the discretion of the BEC, those who were not included in the FVL could be added upon their written request. Awareness of the existence of this SVL was limited and nationwide according to Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs (PERP) only 626 of the voters who might have benefited from the provision actually registered on the supplementary list.

The organisation of the FVL by Voter Serial Number (VSN)⁷ and the allocation of voters to polling booths (PBs) according to that numerical order rather than alphabetically, made it impossible for voters to know their PB without the help of electoral officials or party activists in possession of the FVL. Eventually, the BEC decided to delegate the task of informing the voters of their registration number and polling booth to the political parties, as has been the practice in previous elections. The BEC allowed political parties to establish bases next to the polling centres (PCs) where voters received the information necessary for them to know in which polling booth they could vote. This option runs contrary to the best practice of avoiding such direct contact between party activists and voters after the end of campaigning and especially on Election Day.

PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Registration of political parties was compulsory for the first time. Thirty-nine parties out of 107 that applied were registered, representing a spectrum of political ideologies, from secular and socialist orientations to Islamic conservatism or fundamentalism. Fewer parties contested than in the 2001 elections, when 54 parties fielded candidates. The registration criteria sought partly to exclude 'sign-board' parties with little if any real presence around the country and partly to promote parties' internal democracy and financial transparency. The BEC managed the registration process in an equitable manner, offering parties that initially failed to meet the requirements the opportunity to resubmit their application having made necessary changes. The BEC verified the information provided by parties and many applications were rejected on the basis that purported party offices existed on paper, but not in reality.

⁷ Each voter's VSN comprises 13 digits.

One consequence of the registration requirements was that very small or geographically concentrated parties could not qualify. This affected parties representing minority religious and tribal communities such as Bangladesh Hindu League and PCJSS/UPDF⁸.

The registration of party factions that retained almost identical names made it difficult to distinguish between certain parties, despite each being allocated a specific electoral symbol. By way of example, there are four registered factions of the JP (National Party) and two of the Jatiya Somojtontrik Dal (National Socialist Party). Selection of more easily distinguishable names for parties would be a helpful measure.

The candidate nomination process put both the parties and the BEC under significant stress, with seemingly clear RPO provisions becoming subject to questionable interpretation. The RPO allows parties to nominate more than one candidate in a given constituency on condition that the Returning Officer (RO) is informed of the final candidate before scrutiny of the nomination papers. However, the BEC did not insist on this stipulation, thus favouring parties – mainly the larger ones – with several nominees, since these could fall back on their second or third choice should the preferred candidate be rejected.

The RPO provides that candidates can step down only if they personally sign a withdrawal form submitted before the last day of withdrawal, which was set for 11 December. As parties and party alliances in many constituencies struggled to persuade candidates to withdraw, the BEC determined that a candidate would be retained on the final list only if their party agreed. This amounted to giving parties the right to de-select nominated candidates, which would appear to be in conflict with the spirit of the RPO.

There were 2,454 nominated candidates at the outset. Following scrutiny and withdrawals 1,538 candidates, including 141 independents, remained on the final candidate list which was completed two days late on 14 December. Thirty-three candidates ran in two or three constituencies simultaneously, three constituencies being the maximum allowed under the RPO.

Common grounds for rejection of candidates were bank loan and utility bill defaulting, incomplete application forms and, in the case of independent candidates, fraudulent and insufficient supporting voters' signatures. On appeal, the BEC reinstated some 120 candidates out of 564 rejected by ROs. Some twenty further candidates were reinstated as late as twelve days before Election Day on order of the Supreme Court. The BEC did not have time to appeal these orders before the election but reserved the option to do so afterwards.

AL and BNP fielded by far the largest number of candidates. They had negotiated seat-sharing agreements with their alliance partners for the constituencies in which they did not have their own candidates, ensuring that the two main electoral coalitions effectively had candidates on the ballots throughout the country.

Failure of candidates to withdraw as per agreement implied that in several constituencies competition took place within as well as outside of each coalition, reducing the alliances'

⁸ PCJSS – Parbatya Chatlagram Jano Sanghati Samiti; UPDF – United People's Democratic Front.

electoral impact. A third alliance, the Jukta Front, presented candidates in roughly one-third of constituencies.

CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

The campaign was generally conducted in an open and free environment with parties and candidates not reporting any obstacles to holding meetings and rallies. Overall the campaign was peaceful but isolated violent incidents occurred between supporters of rival candidates. Police and security personnel discharged their duties appropriately on the whole. The army was deployed to ensure additional security from 20 to 31 December.

The official campaign period lasted two weeks, from 12 December to midnight on 27 December. The BEC decided at a late stage that the campaign-free period before Election Day would be 32 hours, rather than the 48 hours specified by law.⁹ The code of conduct prohibited campaigning before and after the campaign period, a rule which was generally respected although the BEC did have to issue warnings to political parties that breached it in a few cases. In previous elections the campaign period was usually of three weeks. Some political parties welcomed a shorter and less expensive campaign, while others, primarily smaller parties, felt that they did not have sufficient time to reach out to voters.

Campaigning methods included processions, speeches, door-to-door visits, and 'miking' – playing messages from loudspeakers on moving vehicles. Most candidates campaigned in their own constituency although the party leaders, especially in the case of the main parties, toured the country in support of their candidates. In general this support from party headquarters was the most candidates could count on, with campaign financing remaining the candidate's own responsibility.

The code of conduct aimed to reduce disparities between candidates' campaigning resources and limited campaign expenses to Tk 1.5 million¹⁰ per candidate. Other measures included a ban on colour posters, the use of motor vehicles in rallies, and offering of food and drinks to voters. The BEC did not have any procedures in place for monitoring campaign expenditure, and many interlocutors claimed that candidates with the financial means spent above the prescribed limit. Candidates and parties are required to submit a statement of their election expenses within 30 days of the election results.

Most political parties' election manifestos included promises to control food prices. Energy production, employment, economic development, corruption eradication, law and order also featured prominently. As far as the major parties' manifestos were concerned, the similarities were more striking than the differences, suggesting a basic policy consensus. There was a tendency in the manifestos to focus more on promises than on the means of realizing these.

⁹ Article 78 of the RPO

¹⁰ Approximately 19,000 Euro.

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The state has retained a significant position in the broadcast sector and owns the only national terrestrial television channel and 12 regional radio stations. The most notable recent development is the rapid increase in the number of satellite television channels: there are now 15 commercial cable television channels. State broadcasters are the principal source of information for most of the population. While there is a very active national and local press, its readership and influence are more limited.¹¹

On 3 November, Rule 5 and 6 of Emergency Power Rules restricting freedoms of expression were repealed and on 17 December the State of Emergency was fully lifted. As a result, the media enjoyed a reasonable degree of freedom of expression, with no reported instances of intimidation or violence against journalists during the campaign.

The EU EOM monitored four TV channels,¹² ten privately - owned newspapers¹³ and two radio stations¹⁴. The monitoring results covering the period 14 November to 29 December indicate that the coverage of the elections was dominated by the two main political parties and their respective leaders, while other registered political parties received negligible coverage. State - owned media gave extensive news coverage of the activities and statements of the caretaker government's advisors.

On 19 December, Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Radio complied with their obligation to provide equitable time to the political parties contesting the elections during prime-time hours. According to the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information on 11 December,¹⁵ registered political parties and alliances with 30 or more candidates may be provided with free airtime for party political broadcasts on state-owned television and radio.

Broadcast media covered the campaign mainly through the news programmes. From 11 December private television channels also broadcast talk shows and special programmes dedicated to the elections. Only a few representatives of political parties took part in the political debate programmes and there was no debate or interviews with the leaders of BNP and AL.

Overall, the tone of the coverage in the broadcast media tended to be neutral. However, private television channel ATN Bangla devoted minimal coverage to JeI and this was generally negative

¹¹ According to the World Association of Newspapers' report, newspaper readership in Bangladesh is estimated at 20 million, less than 15% of the population.

¹² BTV State owned, ATN Bangla, Channel -i, NTV

¹³ The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Jugantor, The Daily Shamokal, The Daily Ittefaq, The Daily Amar Des, The Daily Janakantha, The Daily Star, The Daily Jajidin, The Daily Sangbad, The Daily New Age.

¹⁴ Bangladesh Betar Radio and Radio Today

¹⁵ Registered political parties/alliances who have nominated candidates in 30 to 50 constituencies, may be provided with up to a maximum of 10 minutes; those who have nominated candidates in 51 to 70 constituencies, may be provided with up to a maximum of 15 minutes; those who have nominated candidates in 71 to 100 constituencies, may be provided with up to a maximum 20 minutes and those who have nominated candidates in 101 to 300 constituencies, may be provided with up to a maximum 40 minutes time to give speech for one time only on Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Radio.

in tone. On 23 December JeI filed a case against ATN Bangla for broadcasting a news report which it claimed defamed its leaders.

All monitored newspapers provided a wide range of information, although they allocated most of their political and election coverage to the BNP and AL and their respective alliances. While the overall tone of coverage in the print media remained predominately neutral, JeI received limited and negative coverage.

Although candidates and political parties are not prevented from advertising in private media, no paid spot was seen in the monitored television channels until the last week of the campaign. Private television channels - ATN Bangla and NTV- are the only private channels which aired paid political advertising for AL and BNP. A limited number of paid campaign ads were placed in print media outlets by candidates of the two major political parties.

Voter information and civic education features were aired mainly on state-owned TV and Radio, sponsored by the BEC and the Ministry of Information.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Appeals and petitions related to candidate nominations had a considerable impact on the election process in the month prior to Election Day. New and previously untested regulations for the candidate nomination process and the election commissions' determination to rigorously follow the rules resulted in many candidates being rejected. Later decisions at the Supreme Court reinstated some candidates, decisions that were disruptive to the election process as ballots had to be reprinted a short time before Election Day. Nomination procedures could be amended to ensure there is sufficient time for the entire process to conclude well in advance of the elections, including any appeals to the Supreme Court.

Relatively few campaign irregularities have been reported to the BEC by the Election Enquiry Committees (EECs), the election authority in charge of investigating pre-poll misdemeanours. The majority of cases investigated were resolved at local level through negotiations.

The RPO stipulates that complaints regarding electoral offences are adjudicated by magistrates appointed by the BEC. However the RPO does not specify if these should be executive or judicial magistrates, and it was only very late in the process that the Supreme Court decided in favour of judicial magistrates. Such uncertainties and late decisions have caused ambiguity with regard to procedures and in some instances, also friction between judicial and executive magistrates.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Under the Constitution of Bangladesh, all citizens enjoy equal rights and freedoms, regardless of their gender, race, caste, religion or place of birth. However, due to the prevalence of patriarchal traditions, financial, educational and social constraints, the participation of women in political and state institutions in Bangladesh is very limited.

There were only 52 women among the 1,538 candidates vying for 299 seats. Women candidates contested in 57 constituencies¹⁶. However, a considerable number of them were proxy candidates effectively representing male family members, and only 30 per cent of women candidates contested realistically winnable seats.

Despite the fact that most political party's election manifestos mentioned their good intentions regarding women's empowerment, none of them stated how it would ensure furtherance of these rights.

The enfranchisement of Bihari people was a positive development. Although there are no legal obstacles to the participation of national minorities in the election process, there was a limited representation of minorities among electoral officers and in the electoral administration. Generally, minority representatives throughout the country assumed rather secondary roles. In the electoral administration, they were more present at local level and in political movements they acted mainly at grass-roots level.

A total of 100 candidates belonging to minorities groups filed nomination papers but only 63 candidates in 49 constituencies were finally accepted.

National minorities did not become a particular target-group for election campaigning and no minority groups lobbied for their concerns to be addressed. No clearly-articulated threats or acts of intimidation against minority groups were reported by EU EOM observers, and there were no major negative campaign messages about ethnic or religious minorities.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society involvement has been one of the positive features of the 2008 electoral process. There was a number of election activities carried out by civil society organisations, including election observation, civic education, political party development and efforts to increase the participation of women.

Of the 96 domestic election observation organizations registered by the BEC, the biggest was the Election Working Group (EWG), an umbrella organization comprising 32 civil society organizations. The EWG deployed observers several weeks before elections and during the campaign they published surveys on the election process. On Election Day EWG deployed around 100,000 static and some 1,500 mobile observers country-wide.

The presence of party/candidate agents as well as domestic observers was considered important and contributed to the transparency of the voting and counting processes at polling centre and polling booth level.

¹⁶ Any candidate can stand for election in up to 3 constituencies.

POLLING

The EU EOM observed in some 800 PBs on Election Day. Opening, voting and counting were conducted in a calm, orderly and peaceful atmosphere, with procedures generally being implemented appropriately. All PB staff was present at the opening, but not all polling staff was present in 3 per cent of PBs visited during the day. Women were found to be presiding officers in only 2.3 per cent of PCs visited. All materials required for the conduct of the poll were available at all the PBs visited by EU observers. The BEC polling staff proved to be committed and generally well trained. Campaign material or campaigning activities were observed inside 2.6 per cent of the PBs visited. Additionally, outside 80 per cent of PCs observed, political parties were informing voters of their VSN and their PBs. While this had been allowed by the BEC, the political parties were providing the information on party and candidate leaflets, which constitutes campaign activity.

EU EOM observers reported instances of intimidation in 2.8 per cent of the PCs observed, but otherwise assessed the general environment as fair, good or very good in 98.1 per cent of the PBs visited. Party agents were present in 99.4 per cent and domestic observers in 64.6 per cent of visited PBs. The largest domestic observer group EWG was present in some 60 per cent of PBs.

In the PBs visited, members of the PB staff were following procedures in an appropriate and consistent manner except for stamping and signing the back of the ballots, which was omitted in 2.3 per cent of the PBs observed.

Overall, EU observers evaluated the performance of polling staff as good or very good in 97.4 per cent and the polling process as good or very good in 97.3 per cent of the visited PBs.

CLOSING AND COUNTING

The closure of PBs took place in a quiet and peaceful atmosphere; no cases of intimidation or disruption were observed at closing time. The overall turnout of voters was high at 80 per cent. In half the PCs/PBs observed voters were queuing at closing time and allowed to vote, according to procedure. Party agents were present for the closing and counting in all the PBs visited and the main domestic observer group EWG was present in 69 per cent.

The closing and counting procedures were followed and implemented appropriately in 86 per cent of the cases observed, with some minor technical exceptions. Despite procedural lapses, EU observers noted that the Statements of the Count accurately reflected the results.

Counting was assessed positively in 90 per cent of PCs observed. Polling agents were present at all the counting processes observed. In 10 per cent of observed PCs, a copy of the statement of the count was not requested by party agents present. In 44 per cent of the PCs observed, the statement of the count was not publicly displayed. The public display of the statement of the count is a crucial transparency measure which was not fully implemented.

The EU EOM will continue to observe the completion of the entire electoral process.

The EU EOM wishes to express its appreciation to the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Election Commission for their cooperation and assistance in the course of the observation. The EU EOM is also grateful to the Delegation of the European Commission in Bangladesh and to International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for their support throughout.

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This preliminary statement is available in English and Bangla but only the English version is official.



EUROPEAN UNION
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections 2008

ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়ন নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ মিশন বাংলাদেশ ২০০৮



Peaceful elections mark an important step in the restoration of democratic governance to Bangladesh

Dhaka, 31 December – The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) has released its preliminary findings and conclusions about the Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections. Following observation of all election preparations, and voting and counting on election day, the EU EOM has assessed that so far, these elections have marked an important step in the restoration of democratic governance in Bangladesh.

Chief Observer Alexander Graf Lambsdorff said, *'Bangladeshi people turned out to vote in large numbers, and were able to do so in a peaceful environment. Minor technical difficulties aside, professionalism, transparency and credibility were the hallmarks of this election. The outcome of the election appears to reflect the will of the people of Bangladesh. Our observers did not report patterns of fraud in the process.'*

The high democratic standard set by this election must be sustained in the following days and weeks as the country returns to democratic governance. This will depend on all political leaders and their supporters who have to demonstrate lasting respect for the spirit of parliamentary democracy. It is important to note that a healthy democracy requires a meaningful and constructive role for the opposition, acting in parliament.'

The campaign period began with the full restoration of key rights to freedom of assembly, movement, association and expression on 12 December, and all evidence suggests that these rights were respected. Campaigning was peaceful overall, despite some isolated incidents.

The election commission carried out its mandate in an impartial fashion and demonstrated its ability to conduct the technical preparations for elections, particularly regarding the new voters' register, which has proved to be inclusive, accurate and reliable. Its main flaw is its ordering by number rather than alphabetically, making it more difficult for voters to know where they should vote. It was unfortunate that the electoral commission relied on the resources of party political representatives to inform voters of their correct polling booth. This introduced a degree of contact between voters and party representatives which it is best practice to avoid on election day. The counting of votes was carried out in an overall efficient, transparent and accurate manner.

The EU EOM was joined by a delegation from the European Parliament, led by Dr Charles Tannock, Member of the European Parliament. Dr Tannock said, *'It has been a privilege for us to witness the peaceful and largely well-organised processes of election day and the enthusiasm to return to a representative form of government. With a responsible attitude from all political leaders, this achievement will be a foundation for a robust parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh.'*

The EU EOM's preliminary findings and conclusions will be followed by a more comprehensive final report which will be presented in March and will include recommendations for future elections.










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Results of the elections**Total seats won by political parties (unofficial)****Declared: 300, out of: 300**

Party Name	Symbol	Barisal (21)	Chittagong (58)	Dhaka (94)	Rajshahi (72)	Khulna (36)	Sylhet (19)	Total (300)
Bangladesh Awami League		16	32	87	48	30	17	230
Bangladesh Nationalist Party		2	18	0	8	2	0	30
Jatiya Party		2	2	5	14	2	2	27
Independent Candidate		0	1	1	1	1	0	4
Jatiya Samajtantric Dal-Jasad		0	2	0	0	1	0	3
Bangladesh Jamaytee Islami		0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Bangladesh Workers Party		0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Bangladesh Jatiya Party-BJP		1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Liberal Democratic Party-LDP		0	1	0	0	0	0	1
No Vote		0	0	0	0	0	0	0