**FREE AND FAIR ELECTION NETWORK**

**Observation and Analysis of NA-19 By-Election**

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| **Haripur By-polls: Biometric Voting Piloted, Procedural Irregularities Persist amid Heavy Police Presence** |

**Islamabad, August 16, 2015:** Biometric verification machines were piloted on 30 (6%) polling stations in Haripur (NA-19) where usual procedural irregularities persisted amidst heavy police presence inside the polling stations during the by-polls on Sunday, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its preliminary report.

The by-election was held after a three-member Supreme Court bench, headed by Justice Jawad S. Khwaja, ordered re-poll in the constituency.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) set up a total of 513 polling stations (86 male, 86 female and 341 combined) for 577,480 registered voters (318,161 male and 259,319 female) – slightly higher than the 531,865 voters (296,098 male and 235,767 female) registered in the constituency during the 2013 General Elections. The 513 polling stations had 1,218 booths (609 male and 609 female) for the voters.

FAFEN deployed a total of 104 trained, non-partisan observers (64 male and 40 female) to observe the election process at 419 (82%) polling stations in the constituency. Each observer documented his/her findings on a standardized checklist based on the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1976, Conduct of Elections Rules 1977 and instructional handbooks provided to the election officials by the ECP. This report is based on the observers’ findings from 214 polling stations till mid-day.

The initial findings showed a heavy presence of police inside 198 (93%) of the 214 polling stations observed till mid-day. Similarly, officials from other security and paramilitary agencies were reported to be present inside 37 other polling stations. Under electoral rules, police or other security officials are only authorized to maintain order outside the polling stations to ensure smooth voting process. They can only enter polling stations or booths when requested by the presiding officer.

Political parties were freely breaching the legal guidelines against campaigning and canvassing near the polling stations. The observers reported the presence of party camps inside 400-yards perimeter at 52 polling stations, in violation of election laws that bar the same. Similarly, voters holding party symbol and badges were also seen inside 26 polling stations. Furthermore, the observers reported that the polling officials preferred certain voters from the queue at seven polling stations.

The observers also saw polling agents going behind the secrecy screen with voters at one polling station, while polling officials accompanied voters behind the secrecy screen at another three polling stations. Additionally, the observers reported political leaders, government officials and other influential persons present inside the 22 polling stations without prior authorization.

At 25 polling stations, the polling staff had filled the counterfoils in advance while on another nine polling stations, polling officials were seen issuing the ballot papers without filling the counterfoils.

ECP piloted the biometric verification machines at 30 out of 513 polling stations in the constituency. FAFEN observers reported that on 13 of the 30 polling stations where biometric technology was being piloted, the polling staff issued ballots to voters who were not verified through biometric machine; at one of these polling stations, the polling staff was seen not documenting the results of the verification.

**Recommendations**

1. Security officials should not be deputed inside polling stations and should be instructed to ensure the safety and orderliness from outside the polling station, until their presence inside is absolutely inevitable.
2. The ECP should ensure the removal of all campaign materials and party camps at and near polling stations and should also make sure that no unauthorized person is present inside polling station.
3. There should be legal implications for the election officials who, intentionally or unintentionally, fail to follow the polling processes as directed by the country’s election laws.