**Free and Fair Election Network**

**FAFEN Preliminary By-Election Report**

 **(NA-218 Matiari By-Election January 18, 2016)**

ISLAMABAD, January 18, 2016: Better administration and security arrangements marked relatively peaceful yet low-turnout by-election in NA-218 Matiari. FAFEN observers documented a total of 454 violations of law, regulations and code of conduct from 139 polling stations observed averaging 3.3 violations per polling station. This average is lower than the last two by-elections held in Punjab i.e PP-89 TT Singh with 4.3 violations per polling station and NA-154 Lodhran with 3.5 violations per polling station.

Illegal canvassing around the polling stations and provision of transport facility to voters by the candidates were among few otherwise common violations that were not observed in majority of polling stations in NA-218 by-election, which was supervised by the Election Commission’s own officers. However, many other violations including bar on accredited observers from observing voting and counting processes, presence of unauthorized persons inside polling stations and unavailability of sufficient election material with the staff persisted in Matiari election too.

The seat had fallen vacant after the demise of PPPP President Makhdoom Muhammad Ameen Fahim who in General Election 2013 had won from this constituency bagging 95,843 votes, while Abdul Razzaque of PML-F remained runner-up with a total of 72, 266 votes. No other political party fielded any candidate against Makhdoom Saeeduz Zaman of PPPP in Monday’s by-election; however it was contested by a total of seven independent candidates.

ECP had established a total of 263 polling stations- 44 each for men and women voters and 175 combined- to facilitate a total of 308,398 voters consisting of 48% women and 52% men in the constituency spread over 30 union councils in three Talukas- Hala, Matiari and Saeedabad. In comparison to GE-2013 only one polling station was added to the polling scheme to accommodate 19,745 additional voters -11,265 men and 8,480 women- registered between GE-103 and this by-election.

FAFEN trained a total of 70 observers out of which 66 were deployed (50 men and 16 women) to observe Election Day processes at all polling stations of the constituency. Every observer underwent a rigorous training on election laws and procedures. 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 preliminary report is based on the observation of 139 polling stations from where the information could be acquired on the Election Day. The following are some of the major findings from FAFEN Observation:

# Bar on Observation

FAFEN observers, duly accredited by the ECP, were barred from observing poling processes from five polling stations. At another 11 polling stations, observers were barred from observing the counting processes.

1. Campaigning and Canvassing around Polling Stations

Candidates had established their party camps outside 12% (16 polling stations) of observed polling stations from where the reports could be received on the Election Day. Voters were being issued their serial number slips at nearly 63% of the polling stations where these camps were established while these serial number slips contained party’s or candidate’s election symbol at 6% of these polling stations. Armed civilians were reported to be present at 10 party camps setup around polling stations. Candidates and parties were also seen providing transportation to their voters at 8 percent of the observed polling stations. In addition, candidates’ campaign material was seen displayed inside three polling stations.

1. Polling Station Security

Security officials were not present outside 17% polling stations observed. Legally, security personnel should be deployed at the entrance of each polling station. In 88% of observed polling stations, security officers were found present inside the polling stations.

# Pre Voting Processes

At 17% polling stations observed, polling agents of one candidate or the other made objection at the start of voting process. At 26% polling stations unauthorized persons were found to be present inside polling stations before the polling was started.

1. Availability of Critical Election Material

Through interviews with presiding officers, FAFEN observers documented issuance of ballot papers in excess of total registered voters on at least 11 observed polling stations. At 35 observed polling stations, ballot papers issued at polling stations were not sufficient in number to cater to all registered voters. The copies of Statement of the Count (Form-XIV) issued by the RO were less than the total number of contesting candidates at 15 polling stations. Similarly, at 22 polling stations, the number of Ballot Account Forms (Form-XV) issued by the RO were lesser than the number of contesting candidates. On 11 observed polling stations, at least one secrecy screen per polling booth was not issued. At 61 polling stations, four officially marked ECP seals were not available for every ballot box. Polling schemes were also observed to be unavailable with 25 of the presiding officers posted at different polling stations.

1. Absence and Partisanship of Polling Officials

At nearly 9 percent of the observed polling stations, assistant presiding officers were not present on at least one of the booths while at 6 percent polling stations, polling officers were reportedly missing from at least one of the booths during the official time.

At 12 polling stations, a polling official was reported to have stamped the ballot paper on behalf of voters. At four polling stations, polling staff tried to influence the choice of voters. At 12 polling stations, polling officials could not stop polling agents from stamping ballot papers on behalf of voters. At four polling stations, polling staff could not stop irrelevant persons to accompany a voter behind secrecy screen. At two polling stations, polling officials were seen accompanying voters behind secrecy screen.

1. Unconducive Environment for Women Voters

Female polling staff was not available on 66 observed polling booths while unauthorized men were seen loitering inside 34 women polling booths causing inconvenience for women voters. At six of these polling booths, women voters were seen turning back without exercising their right to vote.

# Suspicious Voting Pattern

There were 13 polling booths at 12 polling stations where FAFEN observers recorded suspicious voting patterns. If the polling is most efficient and each voter is taking approximately a minute and 30 seconds for processing (checking of name, checking of CNIC, filling voter information on counterfoil, issuance of ballot paper, going behind secrecy screen, stamping a ballot and returning of stamp to the assistant presiding officer), there can be approximately 45 votes that can be cast in an hour at a booth. However, the rate of voting was higher than possible at 13 booths of 12 polling stations listed below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Polling Station No. | Polling Station Name | Type | Average Votes polled per hour at the Booth |
| Booth 1 | Booth 2 | Booth 3 | Booth 4 |
| 55 | GBPS Lal Muhammad Chand(Combined) (P) | Combined |  46  |  25  |   |   |
| 57 | GBPS Qasim Bughio (Combined)(P) | Combined |  4  |  27  |  42  |  45  |
| 174 | GGPS Qasim ji Wasi (Combined) | Combined |  53  |  21  |   |   |
| 121 | GBPS-Muhammad Ali Turk(Combined) | Combined |  50  |  -  |   |   |
| 193 | GHSS,Palejani (Combined) | Combined |  20  |  15  |  90  |  15  |
| 222 | GBPS Abu Bakar Moroja (Male) | Male  |  64  |   |   |   |
| 48 | GBHS Bhanoth | Combined |  52  |  32  |   |   |
| 51 | GBPS Shah Muhammad Dahri(Combined) (P) | Combined |  36  |  61  |  60  |  24  |
| 95 | GBPS- Kot Bhanojo (Combined) | Combined |  60  |  25  |   |   |
| 137 | GBPS-Abdul Wahid Buriro(Combined) | Combined |  52  |  28  |   |   |
| 138 | GBPS- Zair Pir (Combined) | Combined |  48  |  28  |   |   |
| 202 | GBPS- Arif Khatian (Combined) | Combined |  40  |  58  |   |   |