

Less in Number but Violations Persist in By-Elections Marked by Heavy Presence of Security

ISLAMABAD, March 22, 2016: Sporadic instances of bar on election observers, illegal campaigning inside and around polling stations, breach of voters’ right to secret ballot, unconducive environment for women voters, illegal restrictions on polling agents by security staff and insufficient availability of critical election material were recorded in otherwise well-administered and peaceful by-elections in two electoral constituencies of Gujranwala and Nausheroferoz on Tuesday.

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) appeared to be in control of things in pre-election and Election Day phases in Gujranwala where the by-election was held on NA-101 Gujranwala-VII. The Returning Officer asserted the writ of the Commission on parties and executive as there were fewer reports of breach of code of conduct by parties and candidates during the election campaign. ECP also managed to curtail otherwise common illegal campaigning and canvassing in the shape of party camps around polling stations and provision of transport to voters. Relatively lesser instances of such breaches were reported from Gujranwala.

However, security officials deployed at some polling stations in NA-101 not only barred FAFEN observers from observing the proceedings but also restricted the access of polling agents from different political parties and candidates to booths, thus raising questions on election transparency.

Though most of contesting parties and candidates boycotted the election on alleged interference of provincial government in PS-23 Nausheroferoz-V, administrative part of by-election was well-managed, although breach of code of conduct during campaign period, mainly by PPP, was reported from several parts of the constituency.

FAFEN observers reported a total of 445 irregularities and illegalities from 148 observed polling stations in the two constituencies – averaging around three violations per polling stations in both constituencies. Highest number of reported violations were related to the insufficient availability of critical material with polling staff such as seals for the ballot box, ballot account form, statement of the count form and polling schemes.

Both by-elections – one National Assembly constituency in Punjab (NA-101 Gujranwala-VII) and one Sindh Assembly constituency (PS-23 Nausheroferoz-V) – were held amid heavy presence of Army, Rangers and Police. Security officials were observed to be acting independent of Presiding Officers at some polling stations.

By-election at Gurjanwala’s National Assembly constituency was necessitated after de-seating of PML-N MNA Iftikhar Ahmed Cheema who had won in GE-2013 securing 99,924 votes with PML-J’s Muhammad Ahmad Chatha remained the runner-up. Cheema’s disqualification was sought by the runner up on grounds that the latter had concealed his financial assets while submitting his nomination.

By-election on Nausheroferoz’s provincial constituency was held because the 2013 winner of the constituency, Masroor Khan Jatoi of the National People’s Party (NPP), was de-notified following a tribunal’s decision on the fake voting plea from the runner-up. NPP candidate had secured 30,594 votes in GE 2013 against PPP’s runner-up FerozJamali who bagged 29,027 votes.

In NA-101 FAFEN trained and deployed 70 non-partisan observers – 48 male and 22 female – while 25 observers – 20 male and five female- were trained and deployed in PS-23 in order to observe the opening, polling and closing processes on the Election Day.

In NA-101, the number of registered vote for by-election had increased by 15% in comparison to GE 2013. For Nausheroferoz, the number of registered voters hiked up by nine percent. However, this change in number of voters did not compel ECP to increase the number of polling stations for by-elections in both the constituencies.

# Pre-Election Environment

A total of 15 validly nominated candidates were running for the seat in NA-101 but in essence, it seemed to be a two-horse race between PML-N’s Iftikhar Ahmad Cheema and PTI’s Muhammad Ahmad Chatha whereas in PS-23, four candidates contested for the seat but practical withdrawal of the independent candidates had rendered the status of a lone runner to PPP’s candidate. Winner of GE-2013 i.e. erstwhile NPP now merged into PML-N also boycotted the election.

In Gujranwala, ECP’s deputed DRO and RO from its own cadre of officers did well in terms of enforcing the code of conduct for political parties and contesting candidates. No extravagant campaign materials were witnessed. Returning Officers got removed the illegal campaign material in few instances where political parties resorted to violate code provisions during campaigning. Gujranwala campaign also concluded peacefully. National level leaders of PML-N and PTI came to conduct electoral rallies in the area. There were reports of PML-N initiating some development schemes in the area but their enactment was stopped by the RO.

On the other hand in PS-23, use of loudspeaker by PPP workers for rallies and announcements were reported. Further the other contesting candidates showed reservations on the deployment of election staff terming them as officials from provincial government and had reservations over PPPP candidate’s campaign. Breach of code of conduct, mainly by PPPP candidate, was reported with oversized banners and posters displayed.

Army was called upon for security in NA-101 while Rangers managed the security in PS-23.

# Election Day Observation

FAFEN observed almost all polling stations in both the constituencies. However, on Election Day, the reports were received from 109 polling stations in Gujranwala while 39 in Nausheroferoz.

**Suspicious Voting Patterns and Change in Polling Scheme**

Keeping in view the vast observation of elections in Pakistan and the international best practices, it takes at least one and a half minute to process one voter at a polling booth. With this rate, no more than 45 voters can vote in an hour. A voting rate greater than 45 voters per hour may, therefore, can be termed suspicious. According to FAFEN observers, suspicious voting patterns were observed at 24 polling booths at 19 polling stations in NA-101 where the number of votes polled in an hour were exceeding the limit while in PS-23 no suspicious voting pattern was observed at any observed polling stations.

In addition, possible deviation from gazzetted polling scheme was also reported. Observers asked Presiding Officers at every polling station as to which census block codes were assigned to his/her polling station. In 18 polling stations in Gujranwala and four in Nausheroferoz, the Presiding Officers either did not tell about the assigned block codes or the block codes they told were different from the ones given in polling scheme.

**Campaigning and Canvassing around Polling Stations**

At 29 polling stations of NA-101, candidates and supporters were seen providing transport to the voters. Party/candidate camps were set up within 400 yards of 13 polling stations while at 11 such polling stations where party/candidate camps were established, voters were being issued serial number slips. Election symbol present on these slips was reported from seven polling stations while party/candidate promotional material was available in five polling stations.

For PS-23, candidate and supporters were seen providing transport to the voters at 11 polling stations. Violation of party/candidate camp being set up within the ECP’s defined limits was reported from three polling stations and from as many polling stations the voters were being issued serial number slips.

**Bar on Observers**

At six polling stations in NA-101, ECP-accredited FAFEN observers were barred from observing the voting processes inside polling station by Army officials. At one polling station in PS-23, FAFEN observer was not permitted to enter the premises by security officials. At another two polling stations, observers were barred from observing counting process in NA-101.

**Female Voting**

FAFEN observers reported absence of female staff at female polling booths at 10 polling stations in NA-101 while at seven polling stations unauthorized men were present inside polling stations. From six such polling stations female voters were seen turning back without voting due to presence of male staff and unauthorized men at the polling booth.

In PS-23 as many as 21 polling stations were observed where male staff was present at female polling booths while at three polling stations, unauthorized men were seen loitering around in the polling station.

**Unavailability of Critical Election Material**

As many as 171 instances of insufficient availability of critical election material were reported on Election Day from NA-101 and 39 from PS-23. In NA-101, 55 cases were reported for insufficient availability of ballot papers issued by RO. Similarly 22 cases were reported where presiding officers did not have polling scheme available with them. In PS-23, polling scheme was missing at nine polling stations while at six polling stations one secrecy screen per polling booth was not available.

**Partisan Polling Staff**

Polling staff was observed stamping ballot papers on voters’ behalf at six polling stations in NA-101 and at another polling station, a polling agent was observed stamping the ballot paper.

At five polling stations in PS-23, polling staff was observed stamping ballot papers while at one polling station polling staff was seen asking voters who they had voted for.

Annex

**Table 1: Polling Stations Where Observers Were Barred From Observation**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Constituency | Number of Observer Barred | Constituency | Polling Station No. Name |
| NA-101 Gujranwala | 6 | NA-101 | PS-117 GGHS, Ahmed Nagar |
| NA-101 | PS-87 GGPS, Mohlanke |
| NA-101 | PS-166 GBPHS, Wazirabad |
| NA-101 | PS-167 GBPHS, Wazirabad |
| NA-101 | PS-2 RHC Qadrabad Road MohallaHaidresad Ali PurChattah |
| NA-101 | PS-169 GMCGPS, Labzar Colony |
| PS-23 Nausheroferoz | 1 | PS-23 | PS-54 Dosal |

**Table 2: Number of Polling Stations/Booths Observed**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NA-101 -Gujranwala | | | PS-23 Nausheroferoz | | |
|  | **Total PS** | **PS Observed** |  | **Total PS** | **PS Observed** |
| Male | 43 | 20 | Male | 12 | 3 |
| Female | 43 | 15 | Female | 12 | 5 |
| Combined | 175 | 74 | Combined | 82 | 31 |
| Total | 261 | 109 | Total | 106 | 39 |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Polling Booths Observed | Male Polling Booths | Female Polling Booths |
| NA-101 Gujranwala | 312 | 181 | 131 |
| PS-23 Nausheroferoz | 91 | 44 | 47 |
| **Total** | **403** | **225** | **178** |

**Table 3: Registered Voters in General Election 2013 and By-Election 2016**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NA-101 -Gujranwala | | | PS-23 - Nausheroferoz | | |
| Voters | GE-2013 | BE-2016 | Voters | GE-2013 | BE-2016 |
| Male | 182,707 | 218,118 | Male | 64,415 | 70,594 |
| Female | 153,061 | 167,898 | Female | 53,739 | 58,263 |
| Overall | 335,768 | 386,016 | Total | 118,154 | 128,857 |

**Table 4: Suspicious Voting Patterns**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Suspicious Voting Pattern - By-Election NA-101 (Observed at 24 booths of 19 Polling Stations) | | | | | | |
| Polling Station No. | Polling Station Name | Type | Average Votes polled per hour at the Booth | | | |
| Booth 1 | Booth 2 | Booth 3 | Booth 4 |
| 32 | Govt.Boys E/S PirKot.(C) | Combined | 34 | 87 | 54 | - |
| 49 | Govt.Boys P/S HardoPandoki.(C) | Combined | 68 | 55 | - | - |
| 70 | Govt. Boys H/S JamkeChattha.(C) | Combined | 39 | 15 | 50 | - |
| 88 | Govt. Boys P/S Booraywali(C) | Combined | 60 | 33 | - | - |
| 118 | Govt. Girls P/S Chaba Cheema(C) | Combined | 66 | 34 | - | - |
| 221 | Govt. Girls E/S Manzoorabad.(C) | Combined | 50 | 40 | - | - |
| 19 | Govt. P/S Madni Town, ChahThathianwala Ali PurChattha (Male) | Male | 6 | 49 | 32 | - |
| 48 | Govt. Girls P/S Drandian.(C) | Combined | 57 | 39 | - | - |
| 56 | Govt.Boys P/S Burj Cheema.(C) | Combined | 50 | 15 | 41 | - |
| 57 | Govt.Girls P/S Thathi Baloch.(C) | Combined | 59 | 38 | - | - |
| 64 | Govt. Girls P/S Jhamwala.(C) | Combined | 83 | 43 | - | - |
| 71 | Govt. Girls H/S JamkeChattha.(C) | Combined | 68 | 35 | - | - |
| 72 | Govt. Girls H/S JamkeChattha.(C) | Combined | 37 | 59 | 25 | 37 |
| 115 | Govt. Boys H/S Ahmed Nagar(C) | Combined | 38 | 31 | 39 | 50 |
| 116 | Govt. Boys H/S Ahmed Nagar(C) | Combined | 17 | 41 | 43 | 63 |
| 220 | Govt. Boys H/S Manzoorabad.(C) | Combined | 56 | 22 | - | - |
| 230 | Govt. Boys P/S Dhapi Ameer Singh.(C) | Combined | 66 | 32 | - | - |
| 232 | Govt. Girls P/S KotYousaf.(C) | Combined | 50 | 46 | 43 | - |
| 237 | Govt. Boys P/S Chourra.(C) | Combined | 58 | 47 | 9 | 32 |
| 238 | Govt. Boys P/S ChakSaan.(C) | Combined | 52 | 37 | - | - |

**Table 5: No. of Observers Trained and Deployed by FAFEN**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Constituency** | **No. of Observers Trained** | **No. Of Observers Deployed** |
| NA-101 Gujranwala -VII | 70 | 70 |
| PS-23 Nausheroferoz -V | 29 | 25 |



