**Low Contestation, High Incidence of Violations Mark Dadu By-Election**

ISLAMABAD, March 4, 2016: Better administration and good security arrangements were witnessed in a relatively peaceful by-election in PS-76 Dadu that was boycotted by one of the major contesting parties against what it called pre-poll rigging by the provincial government.

FAFEN observers documented a total of 364 violations of electoral law, regulations and the code of conduct from 55 polling stations observed, averaging 6.5 violations per polling station on the day of election. This average is higher as compared to the recent by-elections held in other parts of the country where the highest average of violations per polling station did not exceed four.

Announcement of boycott of election by Awami Ittehad Party (AIP) that enjoyed the support of veteran politician and outgoing MPA Liaquat Ali Jatoi came four days before the polling. Liaquat Ali Jatoi opted not to contest election himself this time.

Due to boycott and one-sided contest, the overall election environment lacked the political activism and fervor that elections in Sindh are known for. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had improved its monitoring mechanism as it delegated teams to monitor all polling stations in the constituency for smooth polling process. The ECP made elaborate security arrangements as Rangers were called in for Election Day security. Heavy police and Rangers presence was witnessed in and outside almost all 55 polling stations observed by FAFEN.

However, despite the heightened security and extended monitoring by ECP, irregularities in polling processes continued to be witnessed. Voters were being allowed to vote on photocopies of ID cards, unauthorized personnel were seen loitering inside polling booths, no female staff and security was available for female polling stations and booths, PPPP’s polling agents and workers interfered in the polling process and continuously assisted polling staff in discharge of their official duties such as voter identification, ballot processing and counting.

By-election in PS-76 Dadu-III was held on March 3, 2016 in Khairpur Nathan Shah and Mehar areas in Dadu district. The by-election was followed by a political drama that ended with apex court’s intervention. PPPP’s Ms. Parveen Aziz Junejo had originally won the seat in General Election 2013, securing 56,938 votes while PML-N’s Liaquat Ali Jatoi had been a runner-up, bagging 22,803 votes. However, Mr. Jatoi had challenged the election in a tribunal. The case was still pending with the tribunals when in September 2014, Speaker of Sindh Assembly received resignation from Ms. Parveen Junejo, which was immediately accepted, however, Ms. Junejo later contested that she was forced to resign and the resignation was not out of free will. PPPP leadership was still trying to resolve the mystery surrounding this matter when Mr. Jatoi filed an affidavit in the tribunals signed by Ms. Junejo accepting that her victory was a result of a rigged election. Upon receiving this affidavit, the tribunal de-notified Ms. Aziz Junejo and notified PML-N’s Liaquat Ali Jatoi – the 2013 runner-up – as MPA from PS-76. PPPP took the tribunals’ decision to Supreme Court, which declared tribunals’ decision null and void on January 6, 2016 and ordered a re-election on the seat.

In the wake of Supreme Court’s decision, the ECP scheduled the by-election on March 3, 2016. Liaquat Ali Jatoi did not file his nomination and supported Mr. Ahsan Ali Jatoi of Awami Ittehad Party (AIP). Although, the election was contested by as many as 16 candidates, in reality it was a two-horse race between PPPP’s Aziz Junejo – the husband of Ms. Parveen Aziz Junejo – and Ahsan Ali Jatoi. However, AIP boycotted the election on the grounds that PPPP was using government machinery to pre-rig the election in their opponent’s favour. Thus, the Election Day witnessed no real contestation as only PPPP’s voters, workers and polling agents could be seen in and around the polling stations all day.

FAFEN trained a total of 34 observers out of which 33 were deployed (19 men and 14 women) to observe Election Day processes at 55 polling stations. All the observers went through 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. Some of the major findings from FAFEN Observation are as follows:

1. **Campaigning and Canvassing around Polling Stations**

Candidates had established their party camps outside 29% (16 polling stations) of observed polling stations from where the reports were received on the Election Day. Voters were being issued their vote number slips at nearly 18% of the polling stations where these camps were established while these vote slips contained party’s or candidate’s election symbol at around 5% of these polling stations. Presence of armed civilians was reported at five party camps setup around polling stations.

1. **Polling Station Security**

According to FAFEN’s observation, security officials were present outside and inside all observed polling stations. Legally, security personnel should be deployed at the entrance of each polling station.

1. **Pre Voting Processes**

There was only one polling station where polling agent made objection over voting procedure at the start of the polling. During pre-voting process, unauthorized persons were found to be present at two polling stations.

1. **Availability of Critical Election Material**

FAFEN observers reported issuance of ballot papers in excess of total registered voters at eight out of 55 observed polling stations. The copies of Statement of the Count (Form-XIV) issued by the RO were less than the total number of contesting candidates (i.e. 16) at 30 polling stations. Similarly, at 34 polling stations, the number of Ballot Account Forms (Form-XV) issued by the RO were lesser than the number of contesting candidates. At 10 observed polling stations, one secrecy screen per polling booth was not issued by the RO. Four officially marked ECP seals were not available for one ballot box per booth.

1. **Absence and Partisanship of Polling Officials**

At nearly 25% percent of the observed polling stations, Assistant Presiding Officers were not present while at 20% (11) polling stations, polling officers were observed to be taking breaks during the official time.

At 29 polling stations, polling officials were reported to have stamped the ballot papers on behalf of voters. At eight polling stations, polling staff could not stop polling agents or other irrelevant persons to accompany a voter behind the secrecy screen.

1. **Un-conducive Environment for Women Voters**

There were 40 incidents where female polling staff was not available at observed female polling booth while 14 such incidents were recorded where unauthorized persons were seen loitering inside female polling booths causing inconvenience for women voters. A total of 17 incidents were recorded where women voters were seen turning back without exercising their right to vote. Additionally, FAFEN observers also documented 12 incidents where female voters were barred to cast their vote due to some agreement.

# Suspicious Voting Patterns

There were two polling booths at one polling station *(PS 77, GPS Pejaho)* where FAFEN observers recorded suspicious voting patterns. If the polling is most efficient and each voter takes 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), approximately 45 votes can be cast in an hour at a booth. However, the rate of voting was higher than possible at two booths of aforementioned polling station.

# Polling Scheme Deviations

Polling scheme deviations occur when the gazetted polling scheme is not complied by the Election Officials. In case of non-compliance, the assigned Census Blocks should be matched with polling scheme in the gazette and if some discrepancy is found, the polling scheme is said to be deviated. FAFEN observers asked the Presiding Officer of each observed polling station about the assigned Census Blocks to the polling station and documented their findings. Afterwards, these responses were matched with polling scheme in the gazette. Observers reported six such incidents where certain Census Blocks were not assigned to particular polling stations.